

RICE UNIVERSITY

**Listening to Each Other, Ourselves, and the World:
A Study of Heidegger's Concepts of Discourse and Language**

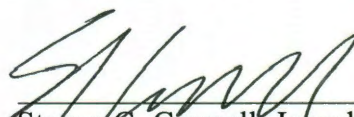
by

James Patrick Andrus

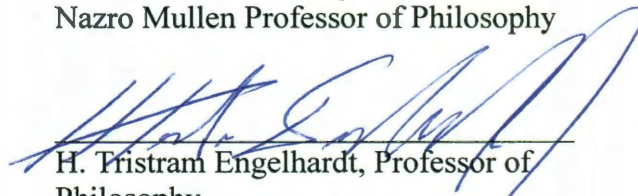
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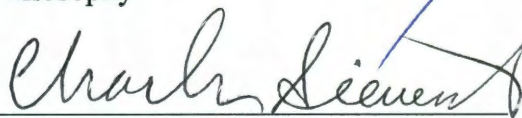
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ABSTRACT

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In this thesis, I argue two main points concerning the significance and development of Martin Heidegger's concepts of discourse and language. The first is that his concept of discourse, which for the Heidegger of *Being and Time* is the human practice of articulating meaning or intelligibility, has often been misunderstood as either (a) simply another name for natural languages, or (b) a wholly prelinguistic *and* precommunicative phenomenon. I attempt to find a middle way between these two interpretations that, on my view, is truer to the text, and argue that although discourse does sometimes manifest itself prelinguistically, it is also an essentially communicative phenomenon. The second point I argue is that contrary to the usual interpretation of his development, Heidegger's "turn" to "language" in his later works does not constitute an embrace of linguistic idealism, i.e. the belief that one can only encounter as meaningful objects that have been named in one's natural language. Instead, I argue that it remains, like discourse, a prelinguistic phenomenon, and I also note several interesting parallels between the two concepts. I conclude by making some suggestions about what is really at stake in the transition from discourse to language, and argue that the key difference lies in the fact that, for the later Heidegger, the articulation of meaning is no longer primarily a communicative phenomenon rooted in human activity.

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Many thanks to professor H.Tristram Engelhardt for teaching me the importance of Hegel, a thinker who is not specifically mentioned here but whose influence pervades the entire paper. Special thanks are due to Steven Crowell, who patiently guided me through Husserl and Heidegger's often maddeningly difficult texts and who taught me not only how to read, but also to *practice* phenomenology. I extend my gratitude to Steven DeLay, with whom I have had many fruitful discussions about phenomenology and about life, and whose Kierkegaardian faith has been a steady source of inspiration. Lastly, I thank my partner Carly Eyler, whose long suffering patience and love have kept me grounded in the things themselves.

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Introduction

A common view of the development of Heidegger's philosophy from *Being and Time* to his later works is well summarized by Joseph P. Fell's pithy assertion that it shifts "from what might be called a prelinguistic ground to a linguistic ground" (Fell 1979, 197). By this Fell means that while Heidegger argues in his early works that meaning is constituted by the "prelinguistic" phenomena of disposition, understanding, and discourse, which he dubs the *existentiale*, the transition to the "later Heidegger" involves Heidegger advancing the idea that ordinary languages are in fact human beings' sole source of meaning and significance. According to this view, Heidegger's later thought is a form of linguistic idealism or linguistic constitutionalism¹ – a belief that what things are is what they are constituted *as* by our various ontic² languages (such as French, English, German, and Swahili). Linguistic idealism has many and various consequences, but one of the most unsettling is that the languages we speak essentially limit what entities we can encounter, for the bounds of our world, i.e. the context of significance in which we carry out our lives, are equivalent to the bounds of our language's expressive possibilities. Under this interpretation, then, language for the later Heidegger becomes, to borrow Mark Wrathall's phrase, the "Big House of being." Throughout the paper, we shall refer to this understanding of the development of Heidegger's thought with respect

¹ I will use these terms interchangeably throughout this paper.

² "Ontic" is a term used by Heidegger to denote a particular being as opposed to being itself. The investigation into being itself, or into the meaning of being, is *ontological* in that it does not seek to understand a particular kind of being. As Heidegger writes, "The Being of entities 'is' not itself an entity. If we are to understand the problem of Being, our first philosophical step consists in not ... 'telling a story' – that is to say, in not defining entities as entities by tracing them back to their origin to some other entities, as if Being had the character of some possible entity. Hence Being, as that which is asked about, must be exhibited in a way of its own, essentially different from the way in which entities are discovered" (Heidegger 1962, 26). This distinction is of vital importance for Heidegger, and is usually referred to as the "ontological difference."

to language the “standard view.”³

The standard view of Heidegger’s development is well entrenched in the secondary literature, and there is much in his often ambiguous writings to lend it support. However, over the course of the last decade a trickle of interesting new interpretations have appeared in which this view is, in whole or in part, critically reassessed. One such interpretation is offered by Christina Lafont who argues in her book *Heidegger, Language, and World-Disclosure*, against the standard view, that Heidegger was just as much a linguistic idealist in *Being and Time* as he was in his later writings. That is, although the text evinces some vacillation between on the one hand, an apparent desire to ground language on the primordial phenomenon of discourse, and on the other hand, a recognition of language’s constitutional power, it is nevertheless clear that Heidegger adheres to a linguistic idealist position. Lafont then, for reasons which will be discussed below, uses this interpretation to heavily criticize Heidegger. Another reinterpretation, much more sympathetic to Heidegger, is offered by Mark Wrathall, who argues in his recent book *Heidegger and Unconcealment*, that Heidegger was *never* a linguistic idealist, and that for the early as well as the late Heidegger, beings are meaningful *prior* to their being named by our *ordinary languages*. For Wrathall, both “discourse” in *Being and Time* and “language” in Heidegger’s later works are best understood as prelinguistic phenomena in the sense that in both the earlier and later works, ontic languages rely upon either discourse or *prelinguistic* “language” for their meaningfulness. Yet another interesting take on these issues is offered by Taylor Carman, who argues in his *Heidegger’s Analytic* that Heidegger offers a prelinguistic theory of meaning in *Being and Time*. However, he criticizes Wrathall’s pragmatic *precommunicative*

³ Clear expressions of the standard view are found in Richardson 1993 and Fell 1979.

characterization discourse, charging that it is too far removed from anything resembling the communicative aspects of language. Carman also diverges from Wrathall in that he agrees with Lafont, and most other Heidegger scholars, that Heidegger's later work is shot through with linguistic idealism, making his interpretation a defense of the standard view.

My intention in this paper is to critically assess the merits of these three interpretations of the development of Heidegger's thought from discourse to language. The paper will unfold as follows: In the first chapter, I will discuss and critique in turn the three aforementioned views of Heidegger's development. In the second chapter, I will turn to an in-depth study of the key passages in Heidegger's *Being and Time* which constitute the definitive, if often ambiguous, presentation of Heidegger's early views on discourse and language. The third chapter will turn to two important essays from Heidegger's later period, namely "Language" and "The Way to Language," in order to discern just how radically Heidegger's thinking on these matters changes. Based on this research, I will conclude that Wrathall's interpretation of Heidegger's development is, on the large scale, the most accurate and illuminating. However, I will also argue that we cannot endorse his position wholesale, for I will follow Carman in holding that pragmatic interpreters of Heidegger illicitly downplay the essential role of *communication* in Heidegger's concept of discourse. This will require us to acknowledge that there is a greater gap in meaning between discourse, as presented in *Being and Time*, and the concept of "language" in Heidegger's later works, than Wrathall wishes to allow. However, I will also argue that we may still conclude that the two concepts are closer to one another than is usually supposed, and that some surprisingly deep connections remain

between them in Heidegger's mature works. I hope to present a view of the evolution from discourse to language not as a radical reversal in which Heidegger adopts extreme and indefensible views on the power of ordinary languages, but rather as a sustained, coherent and penetrating investigation into our relationship with the phenomena of meaning and expression.

Chapter One: Debating Heidegger's Development

In this chapter we will attempt to parse the interesting differences that arise in the attempt to get at what is really at stake in Heidegger's early discussion of discourse, his later discussion of language, and the development from the former to the latter, as well as attempt to reach some provisional conclusions regarding the question of Heidegger's alleged linguistic constitutionalism. We will begin with Lafont's view, which may well be the most boldly heretical view of Heidegger's development.

Lafont's Linguistic Idealist Interpretation

According to Lafont, a careful reading of *Being and Time* shows that Heidegger was torn between remaining loyal to his philosophical roots in the Platonic philosophies of Husserl and Frege, and a new, radical insight into the constitutive nature of ordinary languages. This tension, according to Lafont, is responsible for the way that Heidegger apparently vacillates between arguing for a *foundational* relationship between discourse and language on the one hand, and a relationship of *equivalence* on the other. Lafont finds traces of the former tendency in many places throughout *Being and Time*, and contends that it first becomes apparent in the "analysis of significance" in §18, with which Heidegger, in an "Husserlian" manner, "attempted to separate terms that already seemed inseparable in the analysis of the sign (for the sign as such could only be characterized as both ontic and ontological, insofar as its readiness-to-hand consisted precisely in *showing*)" (Lafont 2000, 66). Similarly, according to Lafont, Heidegger also attempts to hold discourse and language apart in order to show that the latter is founded on the former. However, Lafont regards this as an invalid conceptual distinction that amounts to an attempt to artificially hold apart two distinct yet inseparable aspects of

language itself, i.e. language as system of signs and language as discourse. Given the apparent artificiality of this distinction, the founding relationship that Heidegger seeks is, to put it plainly, nowhere to be found, and Heidegger's claim that "the existential-ontological foundation of language is discourse" (Heidegger 1962, 203) amounts to nothing more than the identification of a *methodological* difference.

Lafont also finds problematic Heidegger's attempt to understand discourse both as the articulation of the intelligibility of being-in-the-world *as well as* an essential contribution to world-disclosure from Dasein itself, for according to Lafont, this articulation is something that can only be carried out, so to speak, by language as a system of signs. Heidegger's motivation for holding this view is "a doomed effort to conceive the phenomenon of 'articulation' as categorially distinct from language as a system of signs" (Lafont 2000, 67). Heidegger, given his Platonic roots, was intent on presenting a theory of language that shows its ontological origins on an essential world-disclosing activity that is unique to Dasein, i.e. an *existentiale*. As she writes, "Heidegger presupposes that in this way the 'world-disclosing' function of language (i.e., the resulting 'articulations of intelligibility') could still somehow be traced back to Dasein itself" (ibid.). In attempting to show how this works, however, Heidegger takes on an impossible task, because "such 'articulation' cannot be considered as a product of Dasein" (ibid.). Rather, "Language understood as an 'articulated whole of significance' (as a world-disclosing lexicon, so to say) first supplies Dasein with the intelligibility it requires in order to be able to express a statement at all" (Lafont 2000, 70). It follows from this, according to Lafont, that Dasein's distinctive status is only "borrowed" from the holistic meaning structure that is established by the language into which Dasein is

thrown. Discourse, therefore, is not a contribution *from* Dasein (and thus not an *existentiale*), but is really just another name for the way that meanings are already there for Dasein as a result of its language.

Lafont regards more favorably the second tendency that she describes in Heidegger's discussion of discourse: a tacit *recognition* of the independently constitutive role of ordinary languages, which she considers to be one of *Being and Time*'s genuine philosophical advances beyond Husserl and Frege. That is, alongside Heidegger's attempt to draw illicit categorial distinctions between discourse and language, he *also* begins to understand the way in which ordinary languages constitute meaning independently of Dasein's activities and practices. This conceptual innovation allows Heidegger to succeed in "shattering the Husserlian model of perception" by identifying the "difference between the *apophantic* and the *hermeneutic as*" (Lafont 2000, 69; emphasis in original).⁴ According to Lafont, the recognition of the constitutive nature of ordinary language brings to light the dubious practice of understanding the essences of entities *primarily* as present-at-hand objects with determinable properties. Before we grasp objects theoretically, they already have been interpreted by language and have, therefore, a ready-to-hand, worldly mode of being. Heidegger's insight is that intelligibility was always already articulated by one's ordinary language *prior* to any kind of theoretical understanding of entities.

Lafont argues that this innovation makes plausible a reading of *Being and Time* according to which discourse "*is not anything prelinguistic, but rather language itself*" (Lafont 2000, 70; emphasis in original). According to Lafont, it is only language that can

⁴ According to Lafont, this is one respect in which discourse, as Heidegger says, has already been at work throughout *Being and Time* in the run up to §34 (cf. Heidegger 1962, 203).

give Dasein the contextual intelligibility that is required for thematic, apophantic statements to make sense. For Lafont, this is the only reasonable conclusion to be culled from the discussion of discourse in *Being and Time*, for historical languages are what constitute “worlds” in the Heideggerian sense of an encompassing context of intelligibility, as *intelligible* in the first place. Language’s mode of being in *Being and Time* should be understood as the ontological “granter of meaning” for all beings and all worlds.

On Lafont’s view, however, this conceptual innovation also sows the seeds for the ultimate implausibility of the entire project of *Being and Time*, for as we noted earlier, if one recognizes that historical languages are responsible for the articulation of intelligibility, one must also affirm that Dasein is *not* primarily responsible for the articulation of intelligibility. Instead, Dasein “borrows” its uniqueness from language, for language as a system of signs “alone supplies Dasein with the intelligibility, the ‘understanding of being’ that makes up its disclosedness, the understanding from which *Being and Time* took its point of departure” (Lafont 2000, 71). Discourse, as language, is thus for Heidegger not an *existential*, but rather a necessary *precondition* for there to be beings at all, indeed even for there to be *Dasein*. Dasein’s understanding and disposition do not constitute meaning, but are rather made possible by the prior meaning granted them by language. Thus,

Precisely because Dasein has the “way of being of something that is thrown and depends upon the world,” it immediately becomes clear that any separation Heidegger might postulate between discourse and language, or between meaning and word, is inadmissible (i.e., it could be carried out only from a standpoint untouched by the circumstance of being-in-the-world). (Lafont 2000, 72)

Lafont argues that it follows from this that the project of *Being and Time* faces a grimly

insurmountable systematic obstacle, for Dasein is thrown into a world, and a world requires language for its being. Therefore, language is something that cannot be formed by way of accruing to the meanings constituted by Dasein's activity of prelinguistic discourse, because language must already be present for Dasein to be at all. According to Lafont, it follows that no thrown being, i.e. no being who has as their way of being being-in-the-world, can make the distinction between discourse and language because there is simply no such substantive distinction to be made. For Lafont, to say that language is founded on discourse is like saying language is founded on language. In other words, according to Lafont Heidegger's foundationalist tendencies lure him into giving Dasein credit that is due to language itself. And since this is the case, the concept of Dasein that Heidegger attempts to define only "borrows" its distinctive status amongst other entities from language. According to Lafont's reading of Heidegger, entities become meaningful *things* if and only if they are named by an historical language. Language is not a bridge between Dasein and things, but is the necessary prerequisite for there to be things at all. Thus Heidegger's attempt to establish an ontological foundation for language in Dasein's activities fails, for "we are in principle still quite far from any separation between meaning and word that might offer a basis for the founding relation that Heidegger claims" (Lafont 2000, 73). In other words, for Lafont, Heidegger fails to separate meaning and word because words are what establish meanings in the first place. Heidegger himself eventually realizes that he will be unable to overcome this tension and eventually abandons the attempt to give language a transcendental foundation (in the form of discourse as an *existentiale*, or in any other sense), and forsakes the concept of discourse altogether.⁵

⁵ This claim is not factually true, for, as Wrathall points out, Heidegger reappropriates the term "discourse"

Lafont regards Heidegger's later work as a full embrace of the inevitable outcome of the tension that had built up in *Being and Time* between Heidegger's desire to understand language as founded upon discourse, and the constitutional, world-disclosive, Dasein-independent nature of language. After the famous turning in his thinking in the 1930s, Heidegger finally realized that the instrumental conception of language that he had inherited from Husserl is not true to the phenomenon he is attempting to describe. This abandonment has significant ramifications for, as she writes, "It is this decisive step that allows Heidegger to make his definitive break with the supposed distinctive status of Dasein, a status resulting from the presupposition that Dasein 'harbors in itself the possibility of transcendental constitution' " (Lafont 2000, 90). According to Lafont, the later Heidegger eschews any attempt to make his philosophy transcendental, and makes no effort to find a foundation for world-disclosiveness in Dasein itself.

As Heidegger fleshes out the consequences of an idealistic view of ordinary languages, he develops a "meaning determines reference" view of language that was already nascent in *Being and Time*. According to Lafont, for Heidegger, "the acquisition of *linguistic* knowledge is inextricably interwoven with the 'instituting' of *factual* knowledge" (Lafont 2000, p. 94; emphasis added).⁶ Language, in other words, establishes what facts are available for us to discover. There are only meaningful things that we can encounter insofar as there are words for them. This, Lafont claims, is what Heidegger is getting at when he writes in "The Origin of the Work of Art," "language alone brings

again for a lecture course in the 1950s (c.f. Wrathall 2011, 133n8).

⁶ Or, as she writes much earlier in the book, "[I]n an even further development [of linguistic idealism], he will declare language to be the court of appeal that (as the "house of being") *judges beforehand what can be encountered within the world*" (Lafont 2000, 7). Or, to show one more example, she argues that for Heidegger, "Given the connection [he sketches] between language and world, it is almost a truism that only through a word's 'meaning' (as a 'way of givenness') does the referent (as 'given for us') become accessible" (Lafont 2000, 94).

what is, as something that is, into the Open for the first time,” and further, “Only this naming nominates beings *to* their being *from out of* their being” (Heidegger 2001, 71). Lafont interprets all of these remarks as proof that, for Heidegger, “something becomes accessible *as something* only along the path of linguistic conceptualization” (Lafont 2000, 95), and furthermore, that for Heidegger, there are only *things* insofar as there is word in an ordinary language with which to name them, for it is only by way of being thrown into one of these languages that we can encounter beings at all. Thus, according to Lafont’s interpretation of the later Heidegger, just as for her early Heidegger, linguistic concepts are what that grant us access to *entities* as meaningful *things*.

Lafont argues that despite the groundbreaking nature of this new understanding of language, it once again has dire consequence for the viability of Heidegger’s philosophy, for “any attempt to ‘objectify’ language as an intrawordly entity is excluded by Heidegger” (Lafont 2000, 99). That is, language’s constitutive and world-disclosive nature forecloses any possibility of having a complete grasp of *what it is that language is*, for the universally constitutive nature of language means that we can never trace it back to anything else. Lafont argues that Heidegger denies the plausibility of any of the traditional attempts to carry out such an exercise, and *historical* languages are now explicitly understood as the origin of the ontological difference in every place where they arise. That is, languages provide being or the meaning necessary for human beings to encounter beings at all. Although Heidegger states that his goal in the essay “The Way to Language” (and presumably the goal of many of his later writings) is to “bring language to language as language” (Heidegger 1993, 399), this is in fact a futile task, for “The totalizing, holistic, and unthematizable character of this world-disclosing language that in

the form of background knowledge is always already shared by us renders vain any attempt 'to bring language to language as language' ” (Lafont 2000, 107). Thus, according to Lafont, Heidegger falls prey to the same trap that every adherent of the linguistic turn that dominated much 20th century philosophy must, and argues that Dirk Koppelberg's critique of the limits of W.V.O. Quine's philosophy of language apply just as well to Heidegger's: “[we] cannot make the objects of our philosophical analysis at the same time into the instruments of this analysis” (Koppelberg 1987, 117). Heidegger's quest is once again doomed to failure, for we can never bring *to* language the essence *of* language, for language is the medium through which such analyses must be carried out. Thus, both Heidegger's early and late discussions of language suffer from a grave inconsistency: Heidegger's continued attempt to use language to analyze and express the essence of language.

Critique of the Linguistic Idealist Interpretation

In *Heidegger and Unconcealment*, Mark Wrathall has argued forcefully against linguistic idealist interpretations of both *Being and Time* and Heidegger's later works, and targets Lafont's position as a particularly forthright and pernicious example of such readings. Wrathall notes that Heidegger's famous and oft repeated slogan, “language is the house of Being” (Heidegger 1993, 236), is frequently taken as indubitable proof of Heidegger's supposed linguistic idealism, and that “[a]lmost everybody acts as if it is immediately apparent what Heidegger is trying to say: they take [“language is the house of Being”] as a declaration of the view that the being of entities somehow depends on the linguistic expressions we use in thinking or talking about those entities” (Wrathall 2011, 120). Wrathall takes issue with two of Lafont's most radical interpretations of Heidegger:

the first (as we have noted above) is that when Heidegger speaks of “language”, he is referring to any specific historical language, and the second, that the meaning of “language is the house of being” is that a person cannot *experience* anything for which she has no word in her personal linguistic arsenal. As Wrathall notes, according to Lafont’s view of Heidegger, “Language is, in American slang, the ‘big house’ of being: it keeps us locked up within its preexisting expressive capacities” (Wrathall 2011, 121). Against these two claims, Wrathall argues both (a) that “language” does not, at least for the later Heidegger, denote ontic, historical languages, and (b) that for Heidegger, both early and late, there are meaningful things and experiences that cannot be grasped by ordinary languages.

Wrathall finds evidence that militates heavily against Lafont’s first point in the following passage from Heidegger’s late work entitled “A Dialogue on Language”:

Some time ago I called language, clumsily enough, the house of Being. If man by virtue of his language dwells within the claim and call of Being, then we Europeans presumably dwell in an entirely different house than Eastasian man. (Heidegger 1982, 5)

From this it is plausible to suggest that when Heidegger refers to “language” in his later works, he is not referring to ordinary languages, for he names *European* language, which presumably encompasses German, French, English, etc., and *Eastasian* language, which presumably encompasses Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc., as the types of “language” he is discussing. Lafont might counter that in his passage Heidegger is merely noting that European languages are more closely akin to one another than they are with East-Asian languages, thus leaving intact her contention that historical languages are the origin of meaning for the later Heidegger. However, this seems to beg the question as to the nature of the kinship between different European or East-Asian languages. It seems that we can

maintain a prelinguistic notion of “language” for the later Heidegger if the kinship results in the historical languages arising out of the same or a similar fourfold structure of earth, gods, divinities, and mortals. In any case, Wrathall also notes that, in a lecture course on Hölderlin, Heidegger decries the fact that many of his fellow Germans “indeed speak ‘German,’ and yet talk entirely ‘American’” (Wrathall 2011, 126). As should be quite obvious, ‘American’ is not the linguistic medium through which Heidegger’s compatriots are literally speaking, but is a language in an ontologically broad sense that is capable of being common to and manifesting itself in any number of different ontic languages. Furthermore, whatever it *is*, it is not an ontic totality of words or system of signs. The schema that Heidegger is operating with in his later philosophy of language, then, seems closer than it initially seems to the one he employs in *Being and Time* where he differentiates historical languages from discourse.

Wrathall’s argument against Lafont’s second claim, that Heidegger holds that one must have the right linguistic term to be able to experience an entity, is based on a critique of her interpretation of Heidegger’s discussion of Stefan George’s poem “The Word”⁷ from his essay “The Nature of Language.”⁸ Wrathall argues that Lafont

⁷ Stefan George’s “The Word”:

Wonder from far off or a dream
I brought to my country’s border

And waited until the grey Norn
Found the name within her wellspring –

Thereupon I could grasp it tightly and strong

Now it blossoms and shines throughout the
borderland

Once I arrived after a good journey
With a jewel rich and delicate

erroneously assumes that Heidegger intends for each line of the poem to be understood as a proposition that is literally true. Thus, the final line of the poem which reads “No thing may be where the word is lacking” is taken by Lafont as definitive evidence of Heidegger’s adherence to linguistic idealism and the thesis that nothing exists for us that is not named by a word in an ordinary language. This reading is highly problematic, according to Wrathall, for “It takes things as any entity whatsoever. And it takes being in the broadest sense possible” (Wrathall 2011, 144). A careful reading of the passage in question shows that this interpretation does not hold under scrutiny. Heidegger writes:

“Thing” is here understood in the traditional broad sense, as meaning anything that in any way *is*. In this sense even a god is a thing. Only where the word for the thing has been found is the thing a thing. Only thus *is* it. Accordingly we must stress as follows: no thing *is* where the word, that is, the name is lacking. The word alone gives being to the thing. *Yet how can a mere word accomplish this – to bring a thing into being? The true situation is obviously the reverse.* Take the sputnik. This thing, if such it is, *is* obviously independent of that name which was later tacked on to it. (Heidegger 1982, 62; emphasis added)

The first problem with Lafont’s reading is that it commits Heidegger to the belief that *even a god is a thing*, i.e. even a god would rest on the same metaphysical plane as an apple, and each would be equally dependent for their *meaningfulness* on their being named in an ordinary language. The suggestion that Heidegger would actually hold such a view is highly dubious, especially given the integral role that “gods” play his later

She searched long and announced to me:
 “No such sleeps here on the deep ground”

Whereupon it escaped from my hand
 And my country never obtained the treasure

In this way I sadly learned the renunciation:
 No thing may be where the word is lacking (Quoted in Wrathall 2011, 137-38; Wrathall’s translation)

⁸ Cf. Heidegger 1982, 52-108.

philosophy.⁹ But even if we grant that Heidegger may have indeed affirmed this thesis, the second clue weighs even more heavily against Lafont's position: That is, Heidegger clearly states that "the true situation is obviously the reverse."¹⁰ Heidegger has certainly been known to make rhetorical statements that are not meant to be taken literally – see, for example, the first six sentences of the passage under examination – but it is hard to deny that he means it when he says the situation is obviously the reverse of Lafont's interpretation.¹¹ It seems that Heidegger was *entertaining* this Lafontian notion not to endorse it but to show that this is a poor way to understand George's poem. He even gives us a counterexample to Lafont's reading by reminding us that the famous Soviet rocket certainly *was* accessible as something meaningful prior to being named "Sputnik."¹² Thus, whatever it is that Heidegger wants us to get out of the poem, and whatever the relationship between "things" and "language" that Heidegger wants to draw our attention to, Lafont's reading seems to miss the mark. Wrathall's final judgment on Lafont's interpretation is a harshly expressed but trenchant summation of the problems with the linguistic idealist reading of Heidegger: "It takes no great hermeneutic sensitivity to see that Lafont is attributing to Heidegger positions from which he is

⁹ See the essay "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" in *Poetry, Language, Thought* for a good and relatively compact discussion of the role of gods in the later Heidegger's ontology of the fourfold.

¹⁰ It is telling that Lafont omits large portions of this passage when she discusses it in *Heidegger, Language and World Disclosure*, including "the situation is obviously the reverse."

¹¹ Heidegger even contends on the next page that to affirm a Lafontian reading of George's poem "in truth would have thrown everything into utter confusion" (Heidegger 1982, 63).

¹² It might be suggested that Heidegger is attempting to refute not linguistic idealism but rather the mistaken interpretation of linguistic idealism that holds words literally bring beings in to existence. Against this view, Lafont might counter that language of course does not cause the thing to exist but rather makes it accessible to human beings as a meaningful thingly element of a world. I admit that there is enough ambiguity in the passage to make this reading plausible, but I maintain that it seems *more* likely that Heidegger is really trying to show how words in ordinary languages do not make beings accessible in their thingly nature. I argue that when Heidegger stresses that Sputnik "*is* obviously independently of that name which was later tacked on to it," he means that it this rocket is a fully meaningful thing within a certain world prior to being formally named. Indeed, no matter how much I phenomenologically ponder an encounter with something like a rocket ship, I cannot conceive of a possible scenario in which it is meaningful or accessible to me only if it is given a name.

explicitly distancing himself – positions which are ‘crude,’ which ‘throw everything into confusion,’ and, most importantly, which miss the whole point of the exercise” (Wrathall 2011, 145n18).

Wrathall’s Pragmatic Interpretation

Aside from the fact that Wrathall also seeks an holistic understanding of Heidegger’s thought, his own interpretation of the development from discourse to language stands diametrically opposed to Lafont’s. That is, according to Wrathall, Heidegger at no point held that experience is necessarily constituted by linguistic concepts, nor did he ever argue that all possible objects of experience are capable of being grasped in purely linguistic terms. Wrathall’s contention that the early Heidegger was not a linguistic idealist is uncontroversial (though, as my discussion of Lafont shows, not undisputed). However, what is unique about his position is his contention that despite whatever significant changes come about in Heidegger’s understanding of language in his later work, these changes *do not*, as is usually supposed, constitute an embrace of linguistic idealism. Wrathall argues instead that “the shift is in large part a change in thinking about what the word ‘language’ names, and thus it cannot be reduced to a simple change of view about the role of language in mediating our access to the world or in constituting the world” (Wrathall 2011, 124). Indeed, according to Wrathall, what Heidegger names in his later works with the word “language” is not something that linguistic constitutionalists would recognize as language at all, for “[i]n its most fundamental form, language for Heidegger is not a conceptual articulation of experience, nor is it something that we can say in our ordinary language” (ibid.). And yet, it *is* something with which we are able to have an experience. But what is it, then, that

Heidegger is trying to draw our phenomenological gaze towards in his discussions of discourse and language?

Wrathall argues that the shift from discourse to language is not a matter of Heidegger changing the focus of his investigations from one entity or region of being to another, but instead an attempt to come to a better understanding of the phenomenon he denotes with the ancient Greek term *logos*. This being the case, in making the “turn” to language, Heidegger is not expressing a new found interest in language as we normally understand it, as Lafont and others have assumed, but is rather trying a different angle of attack for elucidating the phenomenon that he refers to with the name *logos*. This, of course, compels us to inquire into how Heidegger understands this word. Wrathall glosses Heidegger’s interpretation of *logos* as “a gathering of meaningful elements into a unified structure, a meaningful, but *prelinguistic* articulation of the world on the basis of which entities can be unconcealed and linguistic acts can be performed” (Wrathall 2011, 127, 130; emphasis added). For both the early and later Heidegger, ordinary language, according to Wrathall, is dependent on this gathering of meanings into a unified structure or articulation of a world, i.e. a thoroughgoing normative space or context of standards by which the success or failure of one’s carrying out of their understanding of being may be adjudicated. Wrathall claims that much of the confusion surrounding these issues stems from the fact that when Heidegger “turns” to language in his later work, he is at the same time changing what “language” itself denotes, so that it is no longer understood as a totality of rule-governed words, as he describes it in *Being and Time*, but rather the *logos* itself, the “primary meanings” which are “the relationships or involvements that entities have with us and other things *in a practical situation*” (ibid.).

According to Wrathall, we can find an everyday example of the *logos* in something as simple as the meaning of a door: it is for going in and out of rooms in a building. For Wrathall, this example shows how the structure of the *logos* is constituted by our practical activity, our acts of making sense and understanding. As I will discuss in greater detail below, in Heidegger's earlier understanding of language, a word is simply something that “accrues” to an already constituted meaning (thus the word “door” accrues to the usefulness of the openings allowing us to go in and out of rooms), and as a result *logos* is not dependent on a system of word-signs, but is itself the foundation of all systems of signs. The essence of *logos* is not, according to Wrathall, the totalities of words, i.e. the ordinary languages, that express it, but rather its orientation towards “the meaningful world that is capable of being talked about linguistically” (Wrathall 2011, 131). Wrathall claims that this interpretation is supported by the following passage on the nature of *logos* from the 1925 lecture course *Logic: The Question of Truth*: “what is true is not ... the speaking and discussing, but ... that which is said as such, that which is sayable and posited in each case and always in the same way ... [what can be expressed; the meaning]” (Heidegger 2010, 45). Wrathall argues that this passage indicates an important but often overlooked difference between the *communicative* aspect and the *articulative* aspect of the *logos* (and by extension of discourse).

According to Wrathall, the articulative aspect of discourse consists in making the referential relations of the world *salient*, while the communicative aspect consists in *sharing* these relations with others. This difference has been overlooked, according to Wrathall, because most commentators have assumed that what is essential in *logos* is the action of saying (communication) rather than what is *sayable* (the articulated primary

meanings). This is understandable, for Heidegger's decidedly sketchy description of discourse in *Being and Time* constantly stresses the communicative dimension of the phenomenon. But, in accordance with his interpretation of the passage from the 1925 lecture, Wrathall argues that "both *Sprache* [language] as a sign system and *Rede* [discourse] in the *communicative* sense depend on discourse as meaning articulation" (Wrathall 2011, 131-132; emphasis added). Wrathall claims that this is evinced by, amongst other things, Heidegger's argument in *Being and Time* that the call of conscience is a mode of discourse that is essentially non-communicative.¹³

If all of this holds true, then the change brought about by Heidegger's turn to language is far less drastic than is often supposed, for as Wrathall writes,

In all his works, early and late, Heidegger adheres to some version of the thesis that entities are constituted by the relationships they bear to each other. Something only is the entity that it is in terms of the way it is referred to and aligned with activities and other entities. One might refer to this as a relational ontology. (Wrathall 2011, 136)

What is at stake, then, in the turn to language is not a reevaluation of the philosophical significance of ordinary language, but a recasting and deepening of the understanding of a phenomenon that he had been attending to already in the years leading up to the publication of *Being and Time*, i.e. *logos*, the way in which entities become meaningful in and through their relations to one another.

¹³ An interesting issue is the question of why Heidegger made this change from discourse to language in the first place. Wrathall suggests that Heidegger abandons *Rede* in favor of *Sprache* in an effort to distance himself from the Latin origins of *Rede*. Wrathall does not elaborate on this point further, but it seems to suggest that Heidegger shied away from a word associated with Latin because it makes *logos* and discourse seem too closely linked to rationality and the depiction of human beings as essentially rational animals – the interpretation of human being that Heidegger disputes throughout his philosophical writings both early and late. In other words, he does not reject the underlying notion of *logos* at all, but rather, he only changes his translation to a word more suitable to the phenomenon. As Wrathall writes, "all of these superficially inconsistent pronouncements exhibit one consistent, largely stable view about what Heidegger calls the 'originary meaning' or 'basic meaning' of language" (Wrathall 2011, 134). This is nothing other than *logos* itself, i.e. the meaningful gathering and articulation of significations which is essential to the constitution of any world whatsoever.

Critique of the Pragmatic Understanding of Discourse

Although Wrathall makes a powerful case for his interpretation, it is also susceptible to a convincing criticism, one which is once again succinctly articulated by Fell:

[I]f articulation is inherently prelinguistic, language as the ‘expression’ of articulation will have the task of expressing a ground that is *essentially foreign* to it. In other words, there will be no precedent community of nature between language and articulation such that in expressing articulation language would be returning to its ownmost locale. (Fell 1979, 199)

Fell, then, shares Wrathall’s interpretation of discourse, under which it is understood as a wholly prelinguistic phenomenon. However, he also holds that *because* discourse is prelinguistic, it is thus essentially alien to language, for there is no clear path towards showing the founding relationship that might exist between them. According to Fell, this results in a situation in which meaning cannot be expressed via language, which thus renders language nihilistically empty. Wrathall seems to foresee this objection, and attempts to counter it by arguing that the *logos*, whether in the form of discourse or in the saying of language, “enables particular human languages by giving them the salient significations to which terms can (but need not) accrue” (Wrathall 2011, 154). This is not, however, a satisfactory response, for the nature of the “enabling” ability of originary language remains unclear. How, precisely, does properly using doors *enable* the word “door” (or die Tür, la puerta, or la porte, for that matter) to accrue to a meaning and enable interpersonal communication? Wrathall admits that as it stands, his account of the tie between discourse (as he construes it) and language is tenuous, stating that “we ... need to work out with more care the relationship between ordinary language and originary language” but also that this is “a task to be deferred” (Wrathall 2011, 155).

Rather than deferring this task, however, I argue that Taylor Carman has provided an interpretation of discourse that articulates the relationship between discourse and language in such a way that discourse is, *pace* Wrathall, prelinguistic, but also, against Fell, closely linked to language. Carman shares Fell's worries about the kind of wholly precommunicative interpretation of discourse that we find in Wrathall, but with the important caveat that he does impute this interpretation to *Heidegger* himself, but rather to a mistaken understanding of discourse that underemphasizes its essentially communicative dimension.

Carman argues that pragmatic interpreters of Heidegger misconstrue discourse by "divorcing the concept ... from anything even remotely tied to gesture, expression, or communication" (Carman 2003, 204), and thus rendering the concept unduly solipsistic. William Blattner's argument in his *Heidegger's Temporal Idealism* that a person walking down the sidewalk is engaged in discourse is paradigmatic of such misreadings. In this example, Blattner argues that by simply walking down a sidewalk, one is engaged in discourse because she is *showing* that the proper use for sidewalks is for walking on, and thus articulating their intelligibility.¹⁴ Blattner even goes so far as to insist that such activities are genuinely communicative, even if they are carried out in complete isolation. Not only is this a strange way to understand something called "discourse", but it also leaves little room for differentiating it from Dasein's way of practical understanding, i.e. interpretation as demonstrative practice, and therefore robbing discourse of the special role it is meant to play in world disclosure. If Blattner's example should be criticized for stretching the meaning of "communication" much too far, Wrathall's should be praised

¹⁴ One can easily imagine that he would raise similar objections to Wrathall's example of the practical use of doors in a building.

for admitting that such activities are precommunicative. This, however, does not save it from the charge that it still does not give us an accurate representation of what Heidegger means by “discourse.”

Carman traces the tendency of pragmatic interpreters to construe discourse as non-communicative to John Haugeland’s translation of Heidegger’s original German term *Rede* as “telling” in the sense of telling the time or apprehending the situation in a game of chess. Haugeland writes, “Though Heidegger does not make this explicit, we may surmise that concrete being amidst is reflected in telling what the current position is, the world in telling what a rook or a threat is, and the who in the sharing and communicating” (Haugeland 1989, 65). For Haugeland, *Rede* as telling is a way of responding to differences, and thus has no necessary connection to language. He admits that “there is almost no basis for [this interpretation] in the text], but maintains that this is Heidegger’s position because it accounts for certain apparent vacillations later in *Being and Time* and also “would connect telling directly with norms” (Haugeland 1989, 65-66). Haugeland, then, advocates this position not because it is strongly grounded in what Heidegger actually says, but because it is amenable to a consistent understanding of the whole of *Being and Time*.¹⁵ Beyond the fact that this interpretation is not solidly grounded in the text, it also forces one to affirm the dubious conclusion that “[e]ven in our most private or solitary moments, we are constantly discoursing, just by skillfully differentiating the equipment we use and the tasks we pursue” (Carman 2003, 228). For Carman, the inadequacy of this account lies in its failure to do justice to the essentially communicative nature of discourse that Heidegger stresses numerous times in his

¹⁵ Haugeland’s desire to connect discourse with Dasein’s normative orientation is laudable, but, as we will attempt to show below, his account stresses the wrong kind of norms.

discussion of the concept, for one stretches the notion of communication too strenuously when one countenances thoroughly solipsistic activities like differentiating between kinds of screws or between proper and improper places to walk as communicative. Some of the pragmatic interpreters of Heidegger have attempted to avoid this conclusion by holding that each and every one of our actions contain an element of reflexive normative endorsement and expression, but against this Carman counters that “even if I typically understand what I do as normal and proper, it does not follow that what I do includes as part of its own intelligibility an expression or communication of its normality or propriety ...” (Carman 2003, 231). Attempts to ascribe a dimension of communication or expression to these solitary acts are, according to Carman, merely tacked on by the pragmatists, and, as such, they fail to provide an accurate description of the phenomenon.

The other major problem with the pragmatic interpretation of discourse is that it is “in danger of letting [discourse] collapse ... into Heidegger’s practical conception of understanding” (ibid.). According to Carman, “The projective character of understanding is surely what allows us to differentiate the meaningful elements of the referential context of significance and thus ‘tell’ one thing from another” and, as such, “discourse must be something more than actualizing significations just by coping with them or in light of them” (Carman 2003, 232). It follows from this that the pragmatic account is unable to account for discourse’s articulative nature, for it must assume that intelligibility has already been articulated. According to Carman, “Discourse does not *presuppose* the articulation of intelligibility; it *is* the articulation of intelligibility” (ibid.). The error committed by the pragmatists is that, in their desperation to avoid linguistic idealism, they go too far the other direction and try to argue that *everything* we do can be

understood as discoursing. Carman acknowledges that “just as Dasein always has some mood and some understanding, so too we are in a sense always ‘in’ discourse” (ibid.). However, he adds, “the primordially of an existential structure does not imply that that structure will be made manifest and obvious in any and every concrete case we imagine, as we imagine it” and cites the example of a dreamlessly sleeping person as one who may well not be exhibiting *any* of the features of world-disclosure: “The sleeping person, if he is Dasein, will indeed be an attuned, understanding, discursive agent. But we will not be able to appreciate those aspects of his existence simply by imagining him prostrate and unconscious” (ibid.). To truly get at what Heidegger means by “discourse” we must look to examples in which we stand in explicit discursive relations with others.

The Primacy of Communication

Carman provisionally defines discourse as the “expressive-communicative dimension of practice, broadly conceived, [with] language being just one of its concrete manifestations” (Carman 2003, 205). Discourse, then, constitutes a public space that allows for different expressive possibilities that is always anchored to a specific, ontic location. Discourse, Carman argues, is unique in that it *adds* to the structure of intelligibility a kind of meaning that is as important as, but not identical to, practical significance. Thus, discourse is

the way in which our world is coherently articulated, not just pragmatically or teleologically in terms of ends or activities, but expressively and communicatively, that is, in terms of how it makes sense to express our understanding and convey it to others, and indeed to ourselves” (Carman 2003, 206).

For Carman, then, and *contra* Wrathall, the pragmatic and teleological elements of worldhood belong firmly with understanding and interpretation, while *discourse* accounts

for the way in which we constantly express and communicate our understanding to others and ourselves. Not only do we live in a world that is practically coherent, but one which is also essentially open to being expressed and shared with others. Carman thus denies Wrathall's contention that discourse is a two-layered concept, with the meaning articulating aspect serving as the foundation of the communicative aspect. The pragmatic interpreters of *Being and Time* have overlooked this fact, and understandably so, for we are always, so long as we are Dasein, *also* purposefully and understandingly engaging with the world, and understanding and discourse are thus closely intertwined.

Carman argues that a more accurate interpretation of discourse emerges when we bring the concept closer to something resembling language in its communicative, grammatical, and illocutionary dimensions. In so doing, one is able to understand the way in which discourse and language are essentially linked *without* collapsing one into the other, and also avoid a redundant conception of discourse, whose influence on world constitution is already explained by Heidegger's concept of interpretation. Under Carman's interpretation, discourse is linked to the *norms* that govern showing and saying. The norms that govern showing and saying are "specific to interpretation, governing the intelligibility of demonstrative practices as such" and, for Carman, *this* "is what Heidegger means by 'discourse' " (Carman 2003, 235). Discourse, then, has a close relationship with interpretation, but cannot be identified with it. If through interpretation we learn how to understand something *as* what it is, then it is through discourse that we first gain access to things *as* meaningful in the first place. This fits nicely with many of the examples of discourse that Heidegger actually discusses in §34 of *Being and Time*, such as assenting, refusing, following, and challenging. Discourse is not simply *that* the

world fits together in an intelligible manner, but is rather “the susceptibility of that pragmatic structure to meaningful and appropriate interpretation, which is to say *expression*” (Carman 2003, 236). The concept of discourse is not merely intended to highlight *how* things are intelligible but *that* they are communicable. Pragmatic interpreters have overlooked the fact that just as there are norms governing the pragmatic elements of our existence, so also are there norms that govern the proper ways by which we may express our understanding of existence. As Carman writes, “There are purely discursive norms governing the expression of intelligibility, that is, just as there are purely pragmatic norms governing our purposive activity at large” (ibid.). And discourse is ubiquitous not because it encompasses both kinds of intelligibility, but because just as there is a normative element to the way we engage in our lives in an intelligible context, so also is there a normative element to the way in which this intelligibility is open to being made explicit to ourselves and to others. Just as there is a proper way to be a carpenter, so also are there proper ways in which to *talk about* being a carpenter. The intelligibility of our practical understanding goes hand in hand with the expressability of this understanding.

While Carman is quite astute in his exposition of the meaning and importance of the concept of discourse for *Being and Time*, he very quickly, and, as I will argue, erroneously, endorses the part of the standard view that contends that Heidegger becomes a linguistic constitutionalist in his later work. Without providing any argumentation in support of the claim, Carman declares that “Heidegger settled unequivocally on a constitutive conception of language in his later writings, at least by the mid-1930s” (Carman 2003, 222). There are many reasons to be skeptical of this claim, despite how

well entrenched it is, and we will explore how we might understand the development of Heidegger's interpretation of *logos* differently below.¹⁶ However, before we do this we will turn now to *Being and Time* in order to see how well these interpretations of the concept of discourse fare in light of Heidegger says there.

¹⁶ Carman probably should not be chastised too harshly for not spending a lot of time explaining why we should read the later Heidegger's work as a kind linguistic idealist philosophy because a) most interpreters of Heidegger assume that this is the case, and b) *Heidegger's Analytic* is a book about the early Heidegger, and such a discussion would therefore have been a distraction. This, however, does not change the fact that his view of the development is wrong.

Chapter Two: Discourse and Language in *Being and Time*

We turn now to an investigation into how well these interpretations of Heidegger's concepts of discourse and language map onto what Heidegger actually says about them. Our next step is thus to determine whether discourse is merely another name for language, whether it is entirely prelinguistic *and* precommunicative, or whether it is both prelinguistic *as well as* communicative. Our next major project is, then, an examination of Heidegger's discussions of *logos*, discourse, and language in *Being and Time*. Just before that, however, I think it necessary to present a brief excursus on two Heideggerian concepts to which discourse is intimately related: disposition and understanding.

The Other *Existentiale*: Disposition and Understanding

Before launching into an in-depth discussion of the concept of discourse, it will be useful to briefly review the two other concepts that, according to the early Heidegger, accompany it in making up the essential structure of our way openness to the world. Worlds, if they are understood with Heidegger as totalities of significance, are disclosed through the intertwined working of these three ontological elements, or *existentiale*. This will be helpful not only to show how discourse fits into the overall project Heidegger is attempting to carry out in *Being and Time*, but will also shed light on some of Carman's criticisms of the pragmatic interpretation of discourse.

Disposition.¹⁷ One of the essential features of our being-in-the-world is the fact that we always find ourselves with disposition towards the world. Disposition is

¹⁷ "Disposition" is one of several possible translations for Heidegger's term "*Befindlichkeit*." I have chosen this translation over Macquarrie and Robinson's rendering of *Befindlichkeit* as "state-of-mind" in order to avoid the "mentalistic" or consciousness-laden connotations attached to it. Other possible translations are "attunement" and "affectivity."

Heidegger's concept for the fact that one's mood makes it such that things matter to her in a certain way. According to Heidegger, "[moods make] manifest 'how one is, and how one is faring'. In this 'how one is', having a mood brings Being to its 'there'" (Heidegger 1962, 173). Our disposition is thus, in a sense, the existential "site" of our lives. As such, the condition of having a disposition is not something that we can avoid. Rather, we are all always already *thrown* into one disposition or another. The fact that we are always in some mood or another, that the world and the things within it always matter to us in a certain manner, is disclosive of the fact that we are "thrown." This means that we are always delivered over to a certain situation or context. Furthermore, "The way in which the mood discloses is not one in which we look at thrownness, but one in which we turn towards or turn away" (Heidegger 1962, 174). What Heidegger means by this, is that moods do not disclose themselves, *per se*, but rather they disclose the *things* we encounter in the world in a certain way. Mood essentially influences the way in which things matter to us. A good example of this is how, when one is full of fear, normally mundane sounds or images can instill shock and fright, or how when someone is engrossed in work, carpentry for example, the fact that their feet are becoming covered in sawdust is a non-issue – it does not matter at all. Thus, dispositions are not simply annoying and temporary events that distort the true way in which the world is in itself. As Heidegger writes, "[moods have] already disclosed, in every case, Being-in-the-world as a whole, and makes it possible first of all to direct oneself towards something" (Heidegger 1962, 176; italics omitted). In other words, we only direct ourselves towards things that *matter* to us in one way or another. "Existentially, a [disposition] implies a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we can encounter something that matters

to us” (Heidegger 1962, 177; italics omitted). Steven Crowell nicely sums up the significance of disposition thusly: “Moods are not subjective colorations laid over an objectively given world; they are essential constituents of meaning, and without them nothing in the world could make a claim on me” (Crowell 2001, 213).

Understanding. The second primordial element of Dasein’s world-disclosure is, according to Heidegger, understanding. As Heidegger writes, “A [disposition] always has its understanding, even if it merely keeps it suppressed. Understanding always has its mood” (Heidegger 1962, 182). But what, then, is understanding? Heidegger seeks to describe an unusual conception of understanding which, he claims, *underlies* the traditional, Kantian conception, according to which it is considered to be just one form of cognition alongside others, such as explaining or reasoning. According to Heidegger, these are both derivative “of that primary understanding which is one of the constituents of the Being of the ‘there’ in general” (ibid.). This is, of course, only a negative characterization of understanding, and perhaps a highly contentious one at that. Positively, Heidegger characterizes understanding as an “ability-to-be” (*Seinkönnen*). As Heidegger writes, “In understanding, as an *existentiale*, that which we have ... competence over is not a ‘what’, but Being as existing” (Heidegger 1962, 183). What Heidegger means by this is, roughly, that all of our ways cognizing the world are rooted in a certain primordial understanding of the world that is built up around a certain way of being that we each have taken over. Primordial understanding is, for Heidegger, not understanding of this or that particular item, but rather an ability to *exist* in a certain way. For example, before I can understand a band saw *as* a band saw, I must be the kind of person who understands band saws as ready-to-hand things within my world. An

engineer may well be able to acquire a *technical* grasp of band saws by taking them apart and analyzing its various parts, but without possessing the skillful means by which I can manipulate the saw as a carpenter does, I cannot hope to *understand* it in Heidegger's sense. Ontologically, we are beings whose understanding is fundamentally shaped by the way in which we each skillfully handle and interact with a significant world. The technical understanding of a band saw only makes sense within the context of a prior understanding of oneself as someone for whom building things with wood is significant. As Steven Crowell notes, understanding is, for Heidegger, "that know-how whereby I negotiate my everyday affairs" (Crowell 2001, 213).

The way in which we understand the world is made manifest in the different *interpretations* we form based on our understanding. We interpret things by acting in a certain way, that is, we act according to the "as-structure" of the world in the significance it has according to our own understanding of it. This phenomenon encompasses such diverse examples as the way a gardener treats certain kinds of plants *as* weeds by uprooting them so that they will not harm the plants she is trying to cultivate, or the way that a black bloc anarchist treats the front window of a Starbucks coffee shop *as* a glaring symbol of corporate oppression by hurling a garbage can through it. Thus, interpretation does not "throw a 'signification' over some naked thing which is present at hand" but rather "when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one which gets laid out by the interpretation" (Heidegger 1962, 190-191). Interpretation, then, is the disclosure of a thing or a meaning as it stands within the context of a certain understanding and disposition. Through interpretation,

something is grasped in the particular way in which we understand it, or in what Heidegger calls its “fore-conception” (ibid). The significance of something is brought forward from out of its context in our understanding.

From this it seems that Carman’s claim that the pragmatic interpretation of discourse is dangerously close to collapsing into understanding as interpretation is sound, for if we understand discourse as a phenomenon that shows itself primarily in examples like properly using doors, or telling the difference between different kinds of nails or screws, there seems little room for a meaningful role for interpretation in the structure of *Being and Time*. In other words, the examples of discourse that are cited by Wrathall and the other pragmatic interpreters of *Being and Time* are well accounted for by the way that understanding manifests itself through interpretation. It is indeed possible that Heidegger himself confused and blurred the distinction between these two essential elements of our world-disclosure, but in order to adjudicate this possibility, we must now at last turn to a thorough examination of Heidegger’s discussion of discourse itself.

On §7 B. of *Being and Time*: The Concept of *Logos*

Before turning to §34 of *Being and Time*, where Heidegger gives his fullest account of discourse, it will be useful to review what he says about it in the Introduction, in which he links discourse with the ancient Greek concept of *logos*.¹⁸ According to Heidegger, since the time of Plato and Aristotle, the true nature of *logos* been covered up by subsequent interpretations that have understood the concept to mean reason, judgment, concept, definition, ground, and relationship. None of these, claims Heidegger, allows us to see the phenomenon in question. In an attempt to rectify our impoverished

¹⁸ This connection is especially important for our purposes, since, as we discussed above, Wrathall argues that both ‘discourse’ for the early Heidegger and ‘language’ for the later Heidegger are translations of *logos*.

understanding, Heidegger claims that the essence of the concept can be drawn out by attending to the phenomenon of discourse (*Rede*). Heidegger argues that “logos as ‘discourse’ means ... to make manifest what one is ‘talking about’ in one’s discourse” (Heidegger 1962, 56). Thus, in this provisional definition, discourse means to make clear, apparent, or to point out what is at issue. Heidegger continues to argue that discourse makes manifest what is being talked about either for the one who is discoursing or for the one(s) with whom one is talking. Heidegger, then, leaves open the possibility that discourse need not be carried out directly with others, and this, admittedly, seems to lend some support to the possibility of the kind of solipsistic interpretation of discourse that is defended by the pragmatist interpreters. We will argue that this need not necessarily be the case below, but for now we merely note it and move on.

Heidegger writes, “In discourse, so far as it is genuine, *what* is said [*was geredet ist*] is drawn *from* what is talked about, so that discursive communication, in what it says [in *ihrem Gesagten*], makes manifest what it is talking about, and thus makes this accessible to the other party” (Heidegger 1962, 56). Although the meaning of this sentence is not entirely clear, it seems to indicate that discourse is a way of making meanings accessible or graspable to another. Discourse is shedding light on, or drawing out into the open, a meaning that is already, in some sense, at play or at hand, or one which I already have some understanding of and disposition towards. In its most concrete form, “discoursing (letting something be seen) has the character of speaking [*Sprechens*] – vocal proclamation in words” (ibid.). Discourse is, then, not *just* speaking or language, for these are only the most concrete forms that discourse takes. It lets something be seen *as* something – but what does this mean? It appears to mean that it is shown how it is

integrated in a context of meaning – perhaps in the sense of advancing a new understanding of something, or affirming the present understanding of it. As Heidegger writes, discourse is “letting something be seen in its *togetherness* [*Beisammen*] with something – letting it be seen *as* something” (ibid.). It is a way in which the things that make up our worlds become “unhidden” from their already meaningful but secret “life” that we do not normally notice.

The pragmatic approach to discourse is not necessarily ruled out by any of what we have just discussed, and, as we have seen above, Wrathall and others go to great lengths to argue that the meaningful elements that make up a world are brought to salience both primarily and most of the time via precommunicative means, such as using doors, sidewalks, and differentiating screws. However, this interpretation is already rendered problematic by Heidegger’s constant references to communication and the practice of making meanings manifest to other parties. These hints may, of course, be obviated by the possibility, which Heidegger opens up early on in this section, that discourse need not be carried out exclusively between multiple parties, for discourse can be a way in which Dasein makes sense of something *for itself*. Lafont’s view, on the other hand, does not seem well supported by *any* of Heidegger’s discussion of *logos* and discourse in §7, though this is also not necessarily damaging to her position, given her insistence that Heidegger waffles back and forth between a superficial attempt to ground language in something prelinguistic and his secret insight that language cannot in fact be founded on anything. With these thoughts fresh in our mind, let us turn to §34 of *Being and Time*, in which Heidegger gives his official account of discourse.

On §34 of *Being and Time*: Discourse and Language

Heidegger claims in *Being and Time* that language is an ontic phenomenon that is rooted in a more primordial element of Dasein's disclosedness. More plainly stated, Heidegger is attempting to show that language is founded upon something ontological, i.e. something that is general, or essential to the constitution of meaningful worlds. He writes, "The existential-ontological foundation of language is discourse or talk" (Heidegger 1962, 203). Thus language, as Heidegger understands it in *Being and Time*, is not a primordial phenomenon, but is instead rooted in discourse. Discourse, on the other hand, as the third fundamental *existentiale* of Dasein, *is* existentially primordial with disposition and understanding. The role that it plays in the constitution of worldhood is not entirely clear, however, and Heidegger's discussion is cryptic and feels underdeveloped, and contains some seemingly incompatible assertions.¹⁹ As a result, making sense of it and attempting to develop a unified and coherent interpretation from these pages is quite difficult, and this surely contributes to the fact that there are such wildly varying interpretations of the concept.

Heidegger writes that the "intelligibility of something has always been articulated, even before there is any appropriative interpretation of it. Discourse is the Articulation of intelligibility" (Heidegger 1962, 203-4). By this Heidegger means that even before we engage with the world through our dispositions and our understanding interpretations, the meanings we encounter have already been in some way articulated by discourse. Our everyday coping with the world through, for example, successfully using sidewalks,

¹⁹ Heidegger acknowledges that such is indeed the case in his late work "A Dialogue on Language" wherein he writes, regarding his discussion of discourse and language in *Being and Time*: "The fundamental flaw of the book *Being and Time* is perhaps that I ventured forth too far too early" (Heidegger 1982, 7).

yielding seats to the elderly on subway trains, or scheduling meetings with colleagues is already preceded by these things being shown to us as meaningful or “at stake” through communicative discourse. A Lafontian interpretation of this passage would entail that it is *language* that has always already provided the articulated meanings that we navigate our way through in our everyday activities. Insofar as we hold, with Heidegger, that language is a *mode* of discourse, we cannot deny that language plays an important role in this articulation. But this does not quite get at what Heidegger is drawing our attention towards, because he seems to have in mind something more active than this. It is rather by talking with people, conversing with them, or engaging with them in some truly communicative sense that we begin to learn what is important, what is at issue, etc.

What is articulated through discourse is, according to Heidegger, *meaning*. Meaning, for Heidegger, is “[t]hat which gets articulated as such in discursive Articulation” and which “we call the ‘totality-of-significations’ [Bedeutungsganze]” (Heidegger 1962, 204). There are two important points to emphasize here: the first is that Heidegger clearly regards meaning as something that is articulated through *discursive* activity. This points to the crucial difference between the two kinds of articulation that Heidegger discusses in *Being and Time*: the articulation carried out by the interpretation of one’s understanding and the more primordial articulation of intelligibility that is carried out through discursive discourse. Interpretation, as we discussed above, is the way in which we understand the various things we encounter *as* what they are under a certain understanding or ability to be (such as the way the carpenter articulates the band saw *as* a band saw through its use). But ontologically prior to this kind of articulation is the way in which discourse articulates the band saw *as* meaningful in the first place. By this, I argue,

Heidegger is simply pointing out that we learn that something is meaningful *by way of* communication. Through communication the apprentice carpenter learns the *reasons* why band saws are significant elements in the world of the carpenter. Meaning and intelligibility are not solopsistically articulated through private activities but rather discursively or communicatively. The meanings of the worlds into which we are thrown are made explicit and accessible to us *as* meanings through the communicative activity discourse. In conversance with one another (construed broadly enough to include both linguistic and prelinguistic expression), we discover *that* things are meaningful and important; it is this communicative practice that first opens up to us the various possibilities that we can take over and make our own. The second point is that meaning is a *totality* of significations. This means that meaning is not something that is simply bestowed on individual items that would be what they are independently of their contexts. Rather, meaning is the world, the encompassing meaning-structure that allows various individual items to show up as meaningful in the first place. This being the case, individual meanings only make sense within a worldly context. Discourse is a worldly, world-disclosing phenomenon because it *articulates* the different significations which make up the structure of a world. Discourse as the articulation of intelligibility is the part of our world-disclosure that makes various individual meanings *salient* for the first time. That is, it draws meanings out of their enmeshment in the incredibly complex web of meaning that is constituted through our dispositions and understandings, and in some way grants that meaning its proper distinction from other significances.

It is at this point that Heidegger gives us his first hint as to how, in his philosophy, discourse relates to language. He writes, “The totality-of-significations of intelligibility is

put into words. To significations, words accrue. But word-Things do not get *supplied* with significations” (ibid.; emphasis added). Language, then, is a way in which the meanings that have already been articulated by discourse are expressed. Words “accrue” to meanings that have already been made salient through of discourse. The function of word-things seems to be a way to make meanings *generally* accessible to the speakers of a particular language. What accrual is for Heidegger is not made especially clear beyond his note that it should not be understood as the *supplying* of significations. Instead, Heidegger seems to argue that words become “organically” associated with meanings. That is to say, the accrual of words to meanings is not a ‘conscious’ or ‘mentalistic’ process, but a natural outgrowth of our tendency to systematize and generalize the meanings that make up our worlds. Language, it seems, is the furthest step along the way of the evolution of discourse. Heidegger explains the significance of language further when he writes, “Language is a totality of words – a totality in which discourse has a ‘worldly’ Being of its own’ and as an entity within-the-world, this totality thus becomes something which we may come across as ready-to-hand” (ibid.). Language is thus, for the early Heidegger, an intraworldly entity with the being of something ready-to-hand, which means is that language is a kind of tool that we can grasp and use skillfully, just as we might use a sidewalk, hammer, or computer.

So far all of this seems to fit in well with a prelinguistic, yet communicative, interpretation of discourse. However, we cannot ignore some passages that seem to vexingly resist our interpretation. For example, Heidegger argues that discourse “is existentially language” (ibid.), a statement which obviously lends support to a linguistic idealist reading of *Being and Time*. One might argue, with the linguistic idealists, that

Heidegger is admitting that there is no more than a methodological distinction between discourse and language, and that discourse is simply an aspect of language. I think, however, that there is room for an alternate interpretation. Right before he declares that discourse is existentially language Heidegger argues that “discourse gets *expressed* as language” and that “[l]anguage is a totality of words – a totality in which discourse has a ‘worldly’ Being of its own” (ibid.; emphasis added). This is key, because, I argue, by saying that discourse is existentially language, Heidegger is pointing out that language is the meaningful element *through which* discourse manifests itself as a worldly entity. If language, as Heidegger understands it in *Being and Time*, is a medium through which meanings are explicitly expressed, then discourse is existentially language in that it the existential foundation of all such kinds of communicative expression. Discourse, we might argue, is existential communication. That is to say, discourse also raises significations into salience via discursive means (i.e. through proto-argumentative, reason giving, or explanatory activity, such as assenting, refusing, going along with, etc.), but it need not rely upon the words and symbols that are paradigmatic for language as it is normally understood. Thus, there will indeed be an essential relation between discourse and language, but it does not follow that discourse *is* language – or at least we need not draw this conclusion from this particular passage.

Lending further credibility to the communicative interpretation of discourse Heidegger goes on to argue that it is essentially connected to Dasein’s social nature. He begins his argument by again noting that discourse articulates significantly our being-in-the-world. This is nothing new, but when we unpack what being-in-the-world *means*, we discover an essential link to sociality, for as Heidegger reminds us, “Being-with belongs

to Being-in-the-world, which in every case maintains itself in some definite way of concernful Being-with-one-another” (ibid.). Thus, discourse is always, in some fashion, disclosive of our *sociality*, for as beings whose way of being is essentially being-in-the-world, we are essentially social. A world, for Heidegger, is not something constituted by lone subjects, but by and through relations between human beings and their surrounding environments. The entities that we encounter claim us in the way that they do as a result of intersubjective constitution and thus the articulation of these meaningful entities is also an intersubjective phenomenon. The communicative practice of discourse helps us make distinctions, assign things their proper place, and understand and even debate about what entities are for us. Heidegger continues, “Such Being-with-one-another is discursive as assenting or refusing, as demanding or warning, as pronouncing, consulting, or interceding, as ‘making assertions’, and as talking in the way of ‘giving a talk’” (ibid.). The way in which meanings are put at stake is essentially through our discursive and communicative being-with. Existential communication is the way in which Dasein makes a shared world explicit. To be, for Heidegger, is to be in a socially constituted world of intelligibility and significance, and we *discover* this and make it salient by way of our discoursing with each other.²⁰

We still need to become clearer about how discourse is carried out, how broadly we can understand it, and in what sense is it “communicative.” Heidegger tells us that discourse is always discoursing about something about which we already have some kind of understanding, but which has not yet necessarily been grasped theoretically. This being the case, is discourse then to be understood as a process of making scientific propositions

²⁰ And, as the discussion of conscience in Division II of *Being and Time* shows us, by way of discoursing with *ourselves*.

about these things? Heidegger rejects this characterization, for the formation of verifiable propositions is, for Heidegger, a highly specialized and abstract step beyond what normally constitutes discourse. But what, then, is discourse, if not primarily this? The answer seems to be that discourse is a dialogical, communicative “talking” about things in their significance for us and for our world. Heidegger gives us a clue as to how discourse manifests itself when he writes, “That which the discourse is *about* [das *Worüber* der Rede] does not necessarily or even for the most part serve as the theme for an assertion in which one gives something a definite character” (Heidegger 1962, pp. 204-5). Thus discourse and communication are, for Heidegger, not primarily characterized by making assertions or propositions about the nature of things, but are rather carried out in a “quieter” kind of background activity wherein we communicatively make sense of a world, often without even consciously realizing it.

Assenting might be a prime example of this kind of communication, for we can indicate our assent in a matter without even actually “saying” anything with language, but rather indicating our agreement with a nod of the head or a barely perceptible hand signal. For example, I can silently assent to my bartender’s suggestion that I not drink anymore this evening by paying my tab and leaving the bar, and thus express agreement with her that it is good not to overdrink and cause damage to my health or the health of others, and thus the bartender and I bring into salience the meanings of drunkenness, sobriety, and the proper balance to strike between the two. But despite the fact that the things we discourse about are usually not brought into salience through assertion, there is always something which the discourse is indeed about, for what the discourse is about is an essential structural element of being-in-the-world. As Heidegger writes, “In any talk or

discourse, there is *something said-in-the-talk* as such [ein *Geredetes* as solches] – something said as such [das ... *Gesagte* als solches] whenever one wishes, asks, or expresses oneself about something. In this ‘something said’, discourse communicates” (Heidegger 1962, 205). Something, some *meaning*, is always at stake in our discursive relations with one another, whether it be sobriety, health, drunkenness, Dionysian revelry, or any other. By discoursing about something we are constituting our world in that we are dealing with some single or several structural elements of our world through challenging them, affirming them, or even expressing disdain or disinterest in them. Discourse as a communicative phenomenon is not the transference of information from one soul or brain to another, but rather a discursive “putting-at-stake” of, or expression of what is at issue with some element (or elements) of a shared world of significance. The true sense of communication is *world-disclosure itself*.

This is a crucial point for Heidegger, for, I argue, he is attempting to radically reinterpret the nature of communication, which (at least according to Heidegger in 1927) is typically understood as the making of assertions for the purpose of the transference of information from the inside of one subject to the inside of another subject. However, for Heidegger, in *existential* communication, “the Articulation of Being with one another understandingly gets constituted” (ibid.). One consequence of this is that a *shared* disposition towards the world becomes constituted. This means that we who share a world share a way in which certain things matter to us in various situations, such as when one becomes angry when someone talks loudly on a cell phone one table over a nice restaurant, a meaning that we may articulate through passive-aggressive harrumphing, politely asking the person to take it outside, or pitching the offending phone into the

lobster tank.

A shared understanding is also developed with one another through communication, for through it we understand ourselves, for example, *as* fans of football or Pink Floyd. This is because it is communicative discourse with one another that opens us to what is at issue with professional sports, rock music, or anything else that is meaningful. Things that are meaningful and life-projects that deal with them, are always constituted within the context of a shared world. The norms for success or failure at being a football or rock fan (or a football player or rock musician) always run before us. It is in this way that discourse is equiprimordial with the other *existentiale*, for discourse makes dispositions and abilities-to-be available to us as meaningful – as things worthy of appropriating for ourselves. As Heidegger writes, Being-with “*is* already, but it is unshared as something that has not been taken hold of and appropriated” (ibid.). Discourse is, then, an expression of the normative dimension to things. That is, discourse is the way in which we express that something is right, fitting, or suitable (or for that matter, wrong, ill-fitting, or unsuitable). As Carman argues, discourse accounts for the way that meanings are amenable to being shared with one another. It is not like a file being transferred from one computer to another, but a way in which we say that we find some element or elements of our world-structure to be, to put it simply, good or bad, or even meaningless and thus not part of our shared world at all.

Heidegger claims that there are four essential elements that constitute any instance of discourse: “what the discourse is about (what is talked about); what is said-in-the-talk, as such; the communication; and the making-known” (Heidegger 1962, 206). Although Heidegger claims that there are four elements here, as Blattner points out in his

discussion of discourse in *Heidegger's Temporal Idealism*, “It is hard to tell the difference between communication (*Mitteilung*) and making-known (*Bekundung*)” (Blattner 1999, 71 n51). These are not elements that we can discern by way of analyzing language down to its constituent parts; rather, they are, “existential characteristics rooted in the state of Dasein’s Being, and it is they that first make anything like language ontologically possible” (ibid.). Right after enumerating the essential elements of discourse, Heidegger remarks somewhat curiously that “the factual linguistic form of any definite case of discourse, *some of these items may be lacking*, or may remain unnoticed” (Heidegger 1962, 206; emphasis added). One might argue, on the basis of this passage, that although discourse may be communicative *most of the time*, it need not *necessarily* take a communicative or discursive form. This might lend some heft to Wrathall’s interpretation, for it seems possible that Heidegger indicating that discourse can be instantiated without the presence of communication. However, I am not convinced that we must affirm this conclusion because the “lacking” might well be interpreted as meaning simply that she who is attempting to discourse is doing so poorly due to laziness, cultural ignorance, fatigue, or any number of other reasons, and thus failing to communicate. Indeed, as we saw in our discussion of §7 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger believes that there are failed instances of discourse.

Included in §34 of *Being and Time* are some unusual examples of discourse, which, I argue, offer definitive evidence that discourse is a prelinguistic phenomenon: hearing and keeping silent. According to Heidegger, hearing is just as much an instance of discourse as linguistic expression, and furthermore, it is an especially important element in world disclosure, for “[l]istening to ... is Dasein’s existential way of Being-

open as Being-with for Others” (ibid.). Hearing is one’s most primordial engagement with her social world of significance, and thus to be Dasein is to be open to the meanings and possibilities that are available to us given our social and environmental surroundings. This is why primarily and most of the time we comport ourselves towards the world according to our “they-self” – most of the time we engage with things the way in which we are *supposed to* according to the norms of our worlds. We are able to do this because we can hear the meanings that are communicated to us. This “hearing” need not involve literally cognizing sound waves, but rather is a kind of primordial receptivity that Dasein has for meaning. As Heidegger writes, “Being-with develops in listening to one another [Aufeinander-hören], which can be done in several possible ways: following, going along with, and the privative modes of not-hearing, resisting, defying, and turning away” (Heidegger 1962, 206-07). We hear not by perceiving pure tones which are then organized by the mind into coherent ideas but rather by responding to the meanings we encounter. Hearing is a hearkening to the meaningful world. We hear because we already *understand* and are thus able to encounter howling wolves, chanting crowds, gunfire, the warmth of the sun, the smell of flowers. We dwell amid meaning-laden things. As Heidegger writes, “Dasein, as essentially understanding, is proximally alongside what is understood” (Heidegger 1962, 207). One example of such existential listening is succumbing to the pressure to attend – or “go along with” our friend to – a football game when one has no previous love for the sport, or steadfastly refusing to go along and communicating this by returning your friend’s request with a dumbfounded and incredulous stare, and thus resisting the allures of the savage ballet.²¹

²¹ It is noteworthy that Heidegger gives us a clue as to how we should understand the phenomenon of conscience, which he develops in Division II of *Being and Time* and which we will discuss below. He

Keeping silent is Heidegger's other unusual example of discourse, and he argues that it is, like hearing, one of the most fundamental ways through which we express our understanding of the world. Indeed, it is entirely possible that she who remains silent can express her understanding "more authentically than the person who is never short of words" (Heidegger 1962, 208). The latter is a phenomenon all too familiar to all of us who have had to listen to someone endlessly holding-forth about something, but whom in actuality tells us nothing, and indeed obscures the issue at hand. Indeed, philosophers are probably especially attuned to the possibility of stringing hundreds of pages of words together without ever expressing anything about the significance of the world. And conversely, in keeping silent, even if only for a moment, we can tell something of great significance.²² This point is well illustrated by, interestingly enough, a lyric from Townes Van Zandt's song "Rake," in which a wild young man says, "You look at me now, and don't think I don't know what all your eyes are a sayin'." The wrathfully judgmental eyes of a community communicate their condemnation of the wild young man without anyone having to utter a single word. This is because there is clearly something to be said, and indeed something *is* said, in the silence. As Heidegger writes, "in that case one's reticence ... makes something manifest, and does away with 'idle talk'" (ibid.). Without relying on language, the community *shows* the young man that he has failed to live up to a norm.

Heidegger finds significant the fact that the Greeks apparently had no word of their own for language (or at least what Heidegger understands "language" to denote in *Being and Time*). What they did understand, according to Heidegger, is that human

writes: "Indeed, hearing constitutes the primary and authentic way in which Dasein is open for its ownmost potentiality-for-Being – as in hearing the voice of the friend whom every Dasein carries with it" (Heidegger 1962, 206).

²² We here merely note the fact that many have often accused Heidegger of doing just this!

beings are the beings who have *logos* – that is, they are the beings that *discourse*. It is a mistake to interpret the fact that humans have *logos* to mean that they are rational animals, for this “covers up the phenomenal basis for this definition of Dasein” (Heidegger 1962, 208). Discourse is the phenomenon upon which such an understanding is founded and can be meaningful: “Man shows up as the entity which talks. This does not signify that the possibility of vocal utterance is peculiar to him, but rather that he is the entity which is such as to discover the world and Dasein itself” (Heidegger 1962, 208-209). Thus, Dasein is not merely the being who has reason, or who expresses meanings with a symbolic system, but rather Dasein is the being who is worldly, who dwell in worlds, who find itself always already enmeshed in a structure of intelligibility and significance. Furthermore, we are the beings who develop understandings of what it means to be with each other and who we are in relation to all of this. Discourse is the final piece of the world-disclosure or world *discovery* process, for through its expressive practice it throws light upon the various meanings and entities that for the most part silently sustain Dasein’s existence. Dasein is the being who has *logos* because it is the being that both discovers a meaningful world *and* whose world is uniquely amenable to being talked about.

The Discourse of Conscience

Before moving on, it will be helpful to briefly discuss Heidegger’s interpretation of the phenomenon of conscience from Division II of *Being and Time*, for as we learned above, Wrathall regards this as a particularly strong example of a non-communicative mode of discourse. Initially, Wrathall seems to stand on firm ground in making this claim based on the following passage:

The fact that what is called in the call [of conscience] has not been formulated in words, does not give this phenomenon the indefiniteness of a mysterious voice, but merely indicates that our understanding of what is 'called' is not to be tied up with an expectation of anything like a communication. (Heidegger 1962, 318)

Wrathall seems content to let this passage stand without much analysis, and given that Heidegger seemingly explicitly asserts that the discourse of conscience 'is not to be tied up with an expectation of anything like a communication,' this is not a condemnable stance to take. I will argue, however, that this need not be damning for the communicative understanding of discourse for the following two reasons: First, Heidegger uses two different senses of communication in *Being and Time*: in the pejorative sense of the transference of information from the interior of one person's mind into the interior of another person's mind, and as the general or existential phenomenon of communication that he equates with discourse.²³ Second, a careful reading of what follows this passage shows that a strong case can be made that conscience is a peculiar kind *existential* communication that takes place between different senses of the self.

The phenomenon of conscience is often characterized as either an instance of God speaking to us and condemning us for transgressing divine law, or a result of our reckoning with own guilt and shame resulting from the realization that we have done something morally wrong. Heidegger's interpretation of conscience, however, is captured by neither of these examples. Heidegger rejects the former characterization of the significance of conscience. The "accuser" in the discourse of conscience cannot be God or anyone else, for as Heidegger writes,

If the caller is asked about its name, status, origin, or repute, it not only refuses to answer, but does not even leave the slightest possibility of one's making it into something with which one can be familiar when one's understanding of Dasein has a 'worldly' orientation. (Heidegger 1962, 319)

²³ Cf. Heidegger 1962, p. 205.

To assign an identity to the caller, then, is to take us beyond the bounds of what we can consider proper phenomenological evidence. Heidegger's position is somewhat closer to the second characterization, but with the significant difference that Heidegger's conception of conscience is opposed to imbuing the phenomenon with any specifically moral significance. Furthermore, Heidegger does indeed understand conscience as a peculiar type of discourse, one that is genuinely communicative. How this is possible is elusive at first, for we have already ruled out the possibility that the discourse of conscience takes the form of a communication between two different beings. Thus, we must clarify, in Heidegger's terminology, "*who* is called by the call [of conscience] but also *who does the calling*, how the one to whom the appeal is made is related to the one who calls, and how this 'relationship' must be taken ontologically as a way in which these are interconnected in their Being" (ibid.). Clarifying "who" is involved in conscience and how it is carried out, I will argue, will show that it is a genuinely communicative phenomenon.

Who is involved in the call of conscience becomes clearer when Heidegger states: "*In conscience Dasein calls itself*" (Heidegger 1962, 320). We might initially be inclined to interpret this as meaning that conscience is a merely solipsistic event wherein one merely "talks to herself." Heidegger obviates this interpretation, however, when he writes "Ontologically, however, it is not enough to answer that Dasein is *at the same time* both the caller and the one to whom the appeal is made" (ibid.). The notion that in conscience we are merely "talking to ourselves" is not true to the phenomenon precisely because it does not account for the way in which conscience *assails* us as a *call*. As Heidegger writes, "the call is precisely something which *we ourselves* have neither planned nor

prepared for nor voluntarily performed” (ibid.). But how, then, does Dasein act as both the caller and the called? According to Heidegger, who is called is Dasein in its normal, everyday absorption in the they-self, i.e. the self with which Dasein normally engage in the world. Dasein’s they-self does not take responsibility for owning up to the norms that guide its life because they are the norms that everyone else lives by. The caller is Dasein’s “ownmost potentiality-for-Being.” The call assails Dasein because it is the being that *must* be answerable for how it lives. The life of Dasein is not (merely) an animalistic struggle for survival for Dasein is the being who must ground its activities in meaningfulness. It must take over a possibility for being that is already available to it as a result of its social embeddedness and make itself answerable for it. We are called *from* ourselves, for we are called by our ownmost potentiality, but also from *beyond* ourselves, for our ownmost selves are, proximally and for the most part, *ontologically* distant as a result of our enmeshment in our social contexts.

Heidegger argues that conscience “discourses in the uncanny mode of *keeping silent*” (Heidegger 1962, 322). As we have shown above, this does not preclude the possibility that conscience is communicative because keeping silent is one of the most originary modes of communicative discourse. The discourse must necessarily remain silent because when we are assailed by conscience the ready-to-hand answers to our questions that are usually proffered by the “they” are no longer available, and one is called “*back from this into the reticence of his existent potentiality-for-Being*” (ibid.). When we are struck by the call of conscience, the normal world of significance has ceased to *claim us* as meaningful, and we are left with only the core of our own being. Heidegger describes this experience thusly:

Conscience manifests itself as the call of care: the caller is Dasein, which, in its thrownness (in its Being-already-in), is anxious about its potentiality-for-Being (ahead of itself ...). Dasein is falling into the “they” (in Being-already-alongside the world of its concern), and it is summoned out of this falling by the appeal. The call of conscience – that is, conscience itself – has its ontological possibility in the fact that Dasein, in the very basis of its Being, is care. (Heidegger 1962, 322-23).

Conscience, then, is a form of communication between two ontologically distinct parts of ourselves. When we are gripped by anxiety, and the normal, readily available answers to our questions about life lose their salience for us, the call of conscience assails us from our ownmost potentiality for being and forces us to reevaluate where we have been and where we are going so that we may either affirm it or change direction altogether. As Crowell writes, “For Heidegger, conscience is not itself a kind of private reason but an ontological condition for distinguishing between external and internal reasons, between a quasi-mechanical conformism and a commitment responsive to the normativity of norms” (Crowell 2007, 53-54). This is because in the core of its being, Dasein is not the being that is supposed to blindly and unthinkingly derive its norms from others, but rather, as the being that is, at its very basis, care, it must *choose* to take up these norms and claim them for itself. It is a genuine communication that reminds us that we must own our *own* way of being and not rely exclusively on the endorsement of the “they.” From an “ontic” perspective, the caller is “nobody,” for we can identify no other source for the call. But when we investigate the call from an ontological perspective, that is, when we try to discern the meaning and significance of the call, we see that “the call comes from that entity which in each case I myself am” (Heidegger 1962, 323). Our response to the call is to own up to our unique singularity, to the primitive “thatness” that underlies our being-in-the-world. It is in this sense that we may understand conscience as communicative. As Carman writes, “To say that conscience is discursive is not to say that it has the structure

of conversation, or even soliloquy, but simply that it consists in one's expressive relation to the fact of one's own concrete particularity" (Carman 2003, 295).

In sum, it now seems safe to posit the following three conclusions about Heidegger's concept of discourse. First, and especially given the role of both hearing and keeping silent for the constitution of the phenomenon, it is a prelinguistic phenomenon – albeit one that also manifests itself in every meaningful use of language. Thus we are, so far, in agreement with Wrathall's understanding of discourse. Secondly, however, and *contra* Wrathall, it is a communicative phenomenon, for it is something that *expresses* our being-in-the-world, which is always already being-with. Thirdly, we can now with justification argue that Carman's interpretation is the most accurate and illuminative of the essence of discourse. But if this is so, where does this leave our overarching quest, inspired by Wrathall's work, to find continuity in a strong sense between Heidegger's early and late translations for *logos*, namely discourse and language? That is, if we agree that Wrathall's interpretation of discourse in *Being and Time* is actually closer to Heidegger's concept of interpretation (*Auslegung*), and thus *mistaken*, then what is left as a link between discourse as a communicative phenomenon and the later notion of language? In the next section, I will argue two main points. The first is that the later Heidegger's concept of "language" does remain, in a sense, "prelinguistic," and therefore that Carman and the other adherents of the standard view are mistaken about the later Heidegger's supposed linguistic idealism. The second point is that the connection between the early concept of discourse and the later concept of language is not quite as similar as Wrathall seems to contend.

Chapter Three: Interrogating “Language” with the Later

Heidegger

Language becomes a massive question for the later Heidegger. Many of his later works interrogate the phenomenon of language, and one of his best known later books is even entitled *On the Way to Language*. Why does Heidegger’s later work turn increasingly towards language? In a late essay on the subject simply entitled “Language”, Heidegger argues that it “belongs to the closest neighborhood of man’s being” (Heidegger 2001, 187). This tells us something about Heidegger’s motivation for investigating language, for the arche guiding his later works on language is “for once, to get to just where we are already” (Heidegger 2001, 188). It seems, then, that Heidegger’s goal for his later work on language is not radically opposed to the project he began in *Being and Time*, for he is once again attempting to lay bare who and what we are in light of an ontological dimension that is so near to us that we scarcely even notice it. In *Being and Time*, it is Dasein’s average everydayness and the *existentiale* that constitute this dimension. Now, in his later work, it is language that we miss. Does this then entail that Heidegger is a linguistic idealist, and that to understand the being of the human being is to understand the way in which language shapes the unfolding and disclosure of the world? In one sense the answer is obviously yes, as the quotes we have just discussed seem to imply. However, if we are to take Wrathall’s arguments seriously, there is much room for an alternate interpretation, for what Heidegger means by “language” may well be something radically other than what traditional linguistic idealist philosophies have assumed. There is good reason to at least entertain this notion, for, as Heidegger writes in

his lectures on Parmenides, “Even though our thoughtful inquiry is aiming at basic meaning, we are nevertheless guided by an entirely different conception of the word and of language” (Heidegger 1998, 21). We should also note, with Wrathall, that “language,” like “discourse,” is one of Heidegger’s translations for the Greek concept *logos*. This, of course, could mean many things, and does not automatically lend support to the notion that by “language” Heidegger means something similar or analogous to what he calls “discourse” in *Being and Time*. Bearing this in mind, we turn now to an examination of “Language.”

The “Language” Essay

Heidegger begins “Language” by noting that most people regard language as simply one entity amongst others, one that has a specific nature that can be discovered by interrogating it with presupposed scientific concepts in order to make clear its essential features, much like we might dissect a frog in order to understand the workings of its cardiovascular system. In the language of *Being and Time*, it might be said that prevailing understandings of language regard it as something present-at-hand whose essence can be discerned through isolating it and enumerating its essential properties.²⁴ In this essay, Heidegger proposes to do something entirely different than what other philosophers and linguists do when they interrogate language:

We do not wish to assault language in order to force it into the grip of ideas already fixed beforehand. We do not wish to reduce the nature of language to a concept, so that this concept may provide a generally useful view of language that will lay to rest all further notions about it. (Heidegger 2001, 188)

²⁴ That he *also* no longer considers “language” to be something *ready-to-hand* will soon become clear (or that which the *later* Heidegger denotes with the term “language” is not something of this nature).

Instead, Heidegger, ever the phenomenologist²⁵, proposes to focus solely on the phenomenon of language itself and nothing else, so that we may have what he calls elsewhere an “experience with language.” Pursuant to this end, he asks the reader to think about the formal tautology “language is language” in order to avoid reducing language to something else or subjecting it to the artificial imposition of alien concepts. For Heidegger, when we interrogate the phenomenon of language, we are not trying to “get anywhere,” or to use it as a premise in an argument, or even to scientifically investigate its nature for the sake of pure research. Instead, one’s aim should be to let language itself in its strange singularity come clear. Heidegger suggests that in this exercise, we will learn something simple, yet profoundly important about ourselves and our world, or, as we noted above, we will “get to just where we are already” (ibid.). An important question remains, however: Is Heidegger merely exhorting us to adopt a different methodology for the study of ontic languages like Dutch and Yiddish, as is sometimes assumed, or is he rather, as Wrathall has suggested, asking us to direct our thinking towards the same prelinguistic *logos* that he understood as discourse in *Being and Time*?

What is unconcealed in a phenomenological experience with language?

Heidegger’s enigmatic answer is that language *speaks*, though in a manner of speaking that is distinct from human speech. In what kind of speech does language speak, and why (and how) is it necessarily different from human speaking? And furthermore, what, then, is human speaking, from which the speaking of language is distinct but to which it is essentially linked? Heidegger begins answering these questions when he claims that the

²⁵ Somewhat heretically, I read Heidegger’s later work as exemplary *phenomenological* philosophy, and feel quite justified in doing so, for as Crowell points out, referring to Heidegger’s later works, “[I]f one reads them in the spirit of phenomenological seeing and description, which Heidegger never abandoned in practice even if he abandoned it as a designation for his project, one may discern a keen attention to the way that the most ordinary things can continue to address us even in their very unobtrusiveness” (Crowell 2001, 220).

speaking of language is not, as is usually supposed, the activation of certain biological organs for making sounds or for hearing. In this latter view, Heidegger discerns three presuppositions which serve to obscure the essence of language: First, that speech is expression in the sense of something externalizing itself, i.e. communicating some internal thought out into the world. This is noteworthy, for in *Being and Time* Heidegger also argues that discourse is misunderstood if it is supposed to be essentially communicative in this sense. The second prejudice is that the speaking of language is only an activity of human beings – something that only human beings do and that would be absurd to attribute to the amorphous entity “language.” The third prejudice is that “human expression is always a presentation and representation of the real and the unreal” (Heidegger 2001, 190). In other words, that language speaks primarily by making *assertions* about things that are either existing (for example, Rice University) or not existing entities (such as a purple unicorn standing on my back yard).

These basic prejudices, according to Heidegger, have been in place in one form or another for the last two and a half millennia, and therefore it seems absurd that anyone would question their indubitable veracity. As Heidegger writes, “No one would dare to declare incorrect, let alone reject as useless, the identification of language as audible utterance of inner emotions, as human activity, as a representation by image and concept” (Heidegger 2001, 191). The understanding of language has become a closed system of presuppositions that cannot be questioned from outside, on pain of absurdity. And yet, following his practice of calling into question our understanding of basic concepts, this is precisely what Heidegger intends to do, for although he does not deny the factual veracity of the any of these particular characterizations of language, he is adamant that the

tradition is missing something fundamental about the primordial nature of language itself. But what is missing? What is hidden in the “abyss” opened up by unusual statements like “language is language” and “language speaks”?

Heidegger chooses Georg Trakl's poem “A Winter Evening” to illustrate the strange phenomenon of the speaking of language, “for what is spoken purely is the poem” (ibid.).²⁶ Heidegger does not explain why he so often privileges poetry in his late discussions of language, but he seems to believe that what is spoken in poetry is somehow closer to the speaking language itself, and that it is thereby helpful in breaking the spell of the prejudices of our usual understanding of language. It is significant that in this essay and in many of Heidegger's other writings on language, he does indeed choose to discuss poems as paradigmatic of the “work” that language does when it comes to world disclosure, for they are undeniably *literary* works. This is a marked *contrast* with the discussion of discourse in *Being and Time*, in which the examples of discourse can all be construed as prelinguistic, and this perhaps casts some doubt on the plausibility of concluding that the later concept of language is for Heidegger *prelinguistic*. But before

²⁶ For the reader's reference and edification, here is the complete text of “A Winter Evening” in Albert Hofstadter's translation:

A Winter Evening

Window with falling snow is arrayed.
Long tolls the vesper bell,
The house is provided well,
The table is for many laid.

Wandering ones, more than a few,
Come to the door on darksome courses.
Golden blooms the tree of graces
Drawing up the earth's cool dew.

Wanderer quietly steps within;
Pain has turned the threshold to stone.
There lie, in limpid brightness shown,
Upon the table bread and wine. (Quoted in Heidegger 2001, 207-08)

settling on this negative conclusion, let us first try to find out what is really at stake in Heidegger's discussion of language.

The first thing that Heidegger notes about the poem is the title itself: "A Winter Evening." One might argue that there is nothing important or distinctive about this simple title, or about the entire text of the poem, for that matter. It is, of course, structurally sound, clearly written, and is comprised of very simple statements, whose propositional content is, for the most part, easy to extract and reduce. According to Heidegger, however dwelling on the phenomenon of this poem a bit further shows that it is something quite other than a mere collection of statements about the reality or unreality of entities in the world. Heidegger points out that if we were to judge the title using the usual understanding of language, it would signal that the poem is describing a particular winter evening in a particular geographical location. Yet this is precisely *not* what the poem does, for "A Winter Evening" does not denote a spatio-temporal coordinate in the universe, such as the winter evening of January 14, 1956 in Iowa City, Iowa, at all. But if not this, does it merely provide an image that was produced by Trakl's imagination? Is Trakl simply expressing his innermost thoughts, a vision from out of his sensitive, poetic soul? While acknowledging that this is a tempting answer, Heidegger denies that such is the case. In fact, for Heidegger, "Who the author is remains unimportant" and that the mastery of a poet "consists in this, that the poem can deny the poet's person and name" (Heidegger 2001, 193).²⁷ Thus, this poem and what it shows us is not the speaking of a human being at all, but rather of language itself. Poetry gives a voice to the primal

²⁷ This echoes Heidegger's claim in *The Origin of the Work of Art* that in the case of great works of art, the identity of the artist is superfluous. As he writes there, "It is precisely in great art ... that the artist remains inconsequential as compared with the work, almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge" (Heidegger 2001, 39).

speaking of language. Language *itself* speaks something else – but what? Heidegger's answer is once again enigmatic: he claims that the speaking of language *calls*.

What is called in the speaking of language, and to where? According to Heidegger, *things* are called – not to be present amongst other things present before us, like the various objects arrayed on my cluttered desk, but rather to “a presence sheltered in absence” (Heidegger 2001, 197). The “naming” that is carried out by the calling of language “does not hand out titles, it does not apply terms, but it calls into the word. The naming calls. *Calling brings closer what it calls*” (Heidegger 2001, 196; emphasis added). The calling of language, says Heidegger, brings into close proximity something that is uncalled, something that *is*, but which does not yet grip us in its meaningful salience. This is strikingly similar to the way in which discourse brings to the fore the meanings in which we are enmeshed due to our disposition and understanding, and is akin to the way that Heidegger argues in *Being and Time* that Dasein “is such as to discover the world and Dasein itself” (Heidegger 1962, 208-9). For the later Heidegger, the calling of language invites us to recognize that there is meaning at all; it is Dasein's originary entryway into a world of significance. And yet, despite this similarity, there is also a profound gap between early and late Heidegger on this point, for language, in the later Heidegger's sense, seems to operate outside the realm of the human, and the role of the human in the speaking of language seems unclear. That is, it seems no longer the case that it is *we* who discover things through communicating with one another (and most primordially, with ourselves), but rather it is the saying of language that articulates the intelligibility of things independently of us. For the moment, however, we will set aside this divergence, and retrain our focus of the progression of Heidegger's argument.

What is “a presence sheltered in absence”? This is a curious expression, but I take it to mean that, in the speaking of language, things are called to their *possibilities*, to be present to us in their potential, rather than to their reified being as ontic objects, as things that are either real or unreal. The thing called in poetry is not here before the reader of the poem as a physical presence, as something “real” (hence its absence), yet it is still present in its rich possibility for having a meaningful impact on us – that is, it is present as fitting into and having meaning for a mortal existence. Heidegger argues that things are called by a *naming* “so that they may bear upon men as things” (ibid.). Naming is perhaps something as simple as the poetic expression of the possible meaning of a thing. But what does it mean to be a thing and what does it mean for something to bear upon us as a thing? A “thing” does not, for Heidegger, denote just any entity or object in the world to which we tack on names and titles. Rather, a thing is understood as something that has its proper place within a network of significance in which it may be appraised for how well it lives up to its established role within the network. Heidegger is trying to open us to a possibility for understanding thinghood that underlies the usual understanding of a thing as being an object that is present before us and thus objectively determinable. Poetry, by naming things, calls them into a sheltered place so that they can have bearing upon us, that their possibilities can be opened to us.²⁸ Perhaps poetry, if we understand it as akin to *logos*, invites things into a meaningful context so that they may thereby have bearing on us as crucial elements in the formation of our world. A thing is thus for Heidegger not just an item to be dissected by analytical thinking – indeed, this is why poetry calls things to a presence sheltered in *absence*, for as soon as we try to have

²⁸ This is perhaps not unlike what we learn about the usefulness of the shoes in Van Gogh's painting, as is discussed in “The Origin of the Work of Art” (Cf. Heidegger 2001, 33-4).

an all-encompassing view of a thing, it vanishes, disperses, or breaks down, and thus no longer has bearing on us as the meaningful thing that it is. Things are the primary constituents that constitute our meaningful world. For example, the bread and wine that are named in the last line of “A Winter Evening” are invited into the world of the Christian as meaningful constitutive elements of the Christian sacrament that point towards the sacrifice of Jesus and its redemptive power. Poetry has the unique ability to let things, to use another curious Heideggerian turn of phrase, “*thing*.” Heidegger writes, “By thinging, things carry out world” (ibid.). Thus, rather than simply being resources for sating hunger and causing intoxication, bread and wine help to constitute a world by *bearing* it, or as Heidegger says, by *gestating* it. A meaningful and encompassing world is born out of the “thinging” of the things that make it up. In naming things, language gathers the world together, joining it together, and yes, even *articulates* a world of significance. By listening to the thinging of things that is named by poetry we can find our own unique place in the world.

Heidegger seems to suggest that the unique mediator that obtains between world as meaningful context and the things that bear and sustain it is nothing other than originary language. He writes, “The word consequently no longer means a distinction established between objects only by our representations. Nor is it merely a relation obtaining between world and thing, so that a representation coming upon it can establish it” (Heidegger 2001, 200). Language thus does not simply distinguish one thing or another. Rather, it “disclosingly appropriates things into bearing a world; it disclosingly appropriates world into the granting of things” (ibid.). Language shows how things constitute the world, and how the world makes things possible in the first place. It is only

in light of language that things and worlds can enter into their co-constitutive, reciprocal relationship. It appropriates in so far as it is, as Wrathall notes, “the mutual conditioning through which we and the things around us “come into our own” – that is, become what each can be when conditioned by the other” (Wrathall 2011, 206). Language, as the taking-place of the appropriation, allows world and thing to unfold in their potential. But where do we humans with our human speech fit into this picture? Heidegger remarks that the speaking of language is not anything human. And yet, we are still somehow essentially connected or “given to” speaking, for we are indeed linguistic creatures. According to Heidegger, “The word ‘linguistic’ as it is here used means: having taken place out of the speaking of language” (Heidegger 2001, 205). Thus, the human way of being has been allowed to become what it is *through* the speaking of language. To be human, in other words, is to respond to the norms that we, as “linguistic” beings, can recognize in the speaking of originary language. That is, human speaking arises as an expression of the standards or measures of our worlds. All of our human ways of speaking rest upon the speaking of originary language. We speak insofar as we respond to the speaking of the *logos*.

On “The Way to Language”

Just how far is Heidegger’s later conception of language from his concept of discourse in *Being and Time*? We have noted some evocative similarities between the two concepts in the last section, but in order to come to at least a tentative conclusion as to how closely – or tenuously – these concepts are linked, more must be said. In this spirit I turn now to another of Heidegger’s later essays: “The Way to Language,” wherein, I will argue, Heidegger himself draws many striking parallels between these two

ideas. The similarities, as well as the differences, that Heidegger implicitly highlights here are most illuminating. We will proceed by way of analyzing a number of longer passages in which Heidegger is clearly drawing parallels with the discussion of discourse in *Being and Time*.

We begin with the following: “*What unfolds essentially in language is saying as pointing*. Its showing does not culminate in a system of signs. Rather, all signs arise from a showing in whose realm and for whose purpose they can be signs” (Heidegger 1993, 410). Here we find an interesting similarity with the discussion of discourse in *Being and Time*, for the “work” that language does in world disclosure once again does not culminate in a system of signs, and thus in this sense, language for the later Heidegger may rightly be said, as Wrathall claims, to be prelinguistic. Indeed, this passage strongly militates against Lafont’s argument, for Heidegger explicitly stresses that signs “*arise from* a showing in whose realm and for whose purpose they can be signs.” Just as is the case with discourse, all sign systems, including, presumably, all ontic languages, are founded upon and made meaningful through the articulation of meaning that is carried out by language. One can even imagine that Heidegger would affirm that to the significations articulated by the *saying* of language, words accrue. Languages in the sense of systems of signs are thus, *contra* Lafont, not the primary source of meaning for the later Heidegger, but they instead remain dependent upon an originary articulation of meaning, i.e. the saying as pointing that illuminates the measure of the things in our world. One crucial difference with the discussion of discourse arises, however, in the passage that immediately follows:

However, in view of the well-joined structure of the saying *we dare not attribute showing either exclusively or definitively to human doing*. Self-showing as

appearing characterizes the coming to presence or withdrawal to absence of every manner and degree of thing present. Even when showing is accomplished by means of our saying, such showing or referring is preceded by a thing's letting itself be shown. (ibid.; emphasis added)

This articulates a significant difference between the *communicative* way in which the early Heidegger's holds that discourse articulates the intelligibility of the world on the one hand, and the way in which the saying of language is now located outside of the ken of "human doing" on the other. Heidegger, in his later philosophy, seems to move away from the human-centric (or, more accurately, Dasein-centric) orientation of *Being and Time*. That is, the articulation of intelligibility seems no longer to be rooted in one's communicative discourse with one another and with oneself, but rather in the self-showing appearing of meaning that occurs, apparently, without the aid of the community of human beings. Meaning, for the later Heidegger, *is* prior to its constitution by human understanding and disposition. That is not to say that human saying cannot help with this process, as Heidegger indicates, but rather that for human saying to bring to presence the meaning of something (perhaps through poetic speaking?), the thing must already show itself to us as something meaningful. We will return to the significance of this difference below, but first we should note some more interesting areas of overlap between Heidegger's early and late position.

Heidegger goes on to make some interesting remarks about the significance of hearing for human speaking, remarks that are once again quite familiar to the careful reader of §34 of *Being and Time*:

We know speech to be the articulate vocalization of thought by means of the instruments of speech. However, speech is simultaneously hearing. Speaking and hearing are customarily set in opposition to one another: one person speaks, the other hears. Yet hearing does not merely accompany and encompass speaking, such as we find it in conversation. That speaking and hearing occur

simultaneously means something more. Speech, taken on its own, is hearing. It is listening to the language we speak. Hence speaking is not *simultaneously* a hearing, but is such *in advance*. Such listening to language precedes all other instances of hearing, albeit in an altogether inconspicuous way. We not only *speak* language, we speak *from out of* it. We are capable of doing so only because in each case we have already listened to language. What do we hear there? We hear language speaking. (Heidegger 1993, 410-11; emphasis in original)

Hearing as responding, then, as in *Being and Time*, is a central clue to understanding our relationship with language. In actuality, according to Heidegger, human speaking is a process of hearing and hearkening to the meanings that are already spoken by language. And just as in *Being and Time*, Heidegger implies that the hearing of abstract, pure sounds, or presumably any other variety of “pure experience” is already based upon hearing the things that constitute a world. Our human speech is once again dependent on a mesh of primal meanings.²⁹ In contrast with *Being and Time*, however, where it was understood that discourse articulates the meanings constituted by our understanding and our disposition, Heidegger once again stresses that human speaking is a listening and responding to the articulations opened up no longer primarily *by us* but rather *for us* by the saying of originary language. Heidegger, I think, characterizes human speech this way in order to point out the peculiar way in which we are held in the sway of the meaningful context of the world.

We should also note that “On the Way to Language” contains an elegant discussion of the significance of silence, which was an important theme in §34 of *Being and Time*:

Language speaks by saying, is concerned that our speech, heeding the unspoken,

²⁹ Lafont might take Heidegger’s argument that speech is “listening to the language we speak” as strong evidence for her interpretation. We can avoid this conclusion, however, by remembering that, in his conversation with the Japanese scholar from “A Dialogue on Language,” Heidegger argues that people in different worlds, such as the “Eastasian world” versus the “western world,” will respond to different *originary languages*.

corresponds to what language says. Hence silence too, which one would dearly like to subtend to speech as its origin, is already a corresponding. Silence corresponds to the noiseless ringing of stillness, the stillness of the saying that appropriates and shows. (Heidegger 1993, 420)

In this elusive passage, I argue that we find both another crucial link to Heidegger's early discussion of discourse and a clue to how his notion of existential communication evolves. Silence, Heidegger contends, is not "subtended" to speech, by which he means that silence is not merely the negation or opposite of speaking, or the mere lack of having something to say. This, we should recall, is precisely what Heidegger argues about silence in *Being and Time* – that one can only be genuinely silent when one has something to say. Silence, we recall, can often *say* more than any vocal utterance. True silence is a meaning-laden phenomenon for Heidegger, for it is an expressive response to the noiseless ringing of stillness, the "thatness" of our belonging to a meaningful world. The meaning of silence is no longer grounded in human communicative norms, and yet we find that communication is still present in this structure in a modified form, for silence *corresponds* to the meanings articulated by the saying of language. True silence, just as in *Being and Time*, does not arise out of a lack of something to say, but is, on the contrary, a measured, proper recognition of and answer to a claim made on us.

This is reminiscent of the silent discourse of conscience which we discussed earlier and that is so vital to Division II of *Being and Time*, wherein normal discourse breaks down completely and the meaningful mesh of worldhood no longer claims us as significant. Conscience, as we argued earlier, is a silent communication between one's ownmost self and one's "they-self." But in Heidegger's later work, to whom or to what does silence correspond? To put it very briefly, for the later Heidegger meaning comes about independently of us through the relations between the elements of "the fourfold" –

gods, mortals, earth, and sky. As mortals, we discover ourselves as the unique beings for whom meaning is significant and who are able to bear witness to meaning.

Communication thus is found in this structure in our silent listening and responding to the meaningfulness that claims us. The bread and wine that we discussed above in relation to Trakl's poem came out of the earth, nurtured by the sky, and were blessed with deep significance by a god. For a Christian for whom the sacrament is a meaningful practice, the beginning of communication is the recognition of and appropriate response to the significance of these things for herself, and the resistance to the leveling-down of their thingly essence into mere resources or matter. We no longer come into our own via listening to the call of conscience, but rather through learning to see past the reductive and technological worldview, which might be structurally analogous to the "they-self," to one's own meaningful world (whether it be the world of the Christian, the Shinto, or the atheist), the dimension opened up by earth, sky, gods, and mortals. Language, in Heidegger's later sense, articulates the intelligibility of the fourfold by bringing them into their essential relations to one another. Human are the "linguistic beings" insofar as we are those beings who can understand this, who can listen to the articulations of language in its ringing stillness and, and hold ourselves in the sway of its meaningfulness.

To find a more precise formulation of the relation between language and the dimension of meaning, however, seems to be a difficult task. Indeed, it seems to be the case that no amount of probing into this issue will yield a definitive answer. Heidegger quotes favorably the following dictum from Novalis: "Precisely what is peculiar to language – that it concerns itself purely and with itself alone – no one knows" (quoted in Heidegger 1993, 422). The decisive difference between Heidegger's early and late

thinking on these matters, then, seems to be this, that there is no *scientific* answer – be it an Husserlian phenomenological one or one founded in the natural sciences – to the question of the ultimate source of meaning. Otto Pöggeler’s discussion of the development of Heidegger’s thinking on language is quite informative on this point.

Regarding Heidegger’s early thought, he writes,

In [*Being and Time*], Heidegger gains a new approach for the problematic of logic and language; he understands these in terms of discourse, that is, discoursing as articulating the understanding [disposition] and, therefore, ultimately historical-temporal being-in-the-world. Consequently, language becomes the articulation of the world *which is always bursting open*. (Pöggeler 1991, 220; emphasis added)

Thus, according to Pöggeler, discourse is the articulation of the meanings constituted by a social and historical world. The world bursts open, for the early Heidegger, through Dasein’s activities, which we then articulate with discourse. Turning to Heidegger’s later thinking on language, Pöggeler writes,

In the spoken word, that movement of the world-play which Heidegger calls the “peeling of stillness” is refracted, the soundless appropriative occurring which settles everything into its proper element and *thus allows the world to burst forth*. (Pöggeler 1991, 227; emphasis added)

For the later Heidegger, then, human speaking does not articulate a world that is constituted by disposition and understanding, but responds to one that is constituted through the peeling of stillness of the movement of the world-play, which is then expressed through the saying of language. The role of the human is no longer to communicatively *discover* the intersubjectively constituted world, but rather to allow the movement of the world-play (whatever that may be) to burst forth through poetic expression. The substance of the difference between the early and later Heidegger is felicitously summed up by Thomas Sheehan, who writes, “The crux of the reversal (Kehre) between the earlier and later Heidegger is the recognition that human beings do

not generate the space of meaning *sua sponte* but are pulled into it a priori” (Sheehan 2011, 3). For the later Heidegger, then, our individual and collective projects and moods are subsumed in the movement of the history of being, and our task is to be those who express this history. Existential communication is no longer between various different subjects or Daseins, but between the history of being and the poetically dwelling mortal.

Conclusion

Where do we now stand regarding the question of continuity between Heidegger's early and late philosophy of language and meaning? It seems that we may, despite some significant reservations, affirm at least a thin version of Wrathall's thesis, i.e. that Heidegger never advanced a philosophy that can be correctly identified as a linguistic idealism. The case for the concept of discourse in *Being and Time* to be understood as prelinguistic, we have shown, is fairly straightforward. This is because, as Heidegger clearly argues, there are several things which can be understood as instances of discourse which are simply not linguistic in nature. The central place of hearing, keeping silent, and the existential discourse of conscience all indicate that Heidegger intended discourse to be closely linked to, but not identical with language. We can even go so far as to affirm that, for the early Heidegger, every use of language is an instance of discourse, but we must also affirm that not every instance of discourse is linguistic. We should also note here that we have found it necessary to reject Wrathall's contention that discourse is both prelinguistic *and* precommunicative. This, as our study of Carman's arguments and of §34 of *Being and Time* have shown, does not stand up to scrutiny, for Heidegger clearly intends for discourse to be the articulation of a social space of meaning that is constituted through discursive interactions with others in which we take the measure things and thereby first allow them to claim us as meaningful. And furthermore, although the ontically solitary discourse of conscience might seem to give the lie to this notion, we have shown that even this experience is an ontologically communicative one through which Dasein discovers the norms that are most important for its own life.

The case for arguing that Heidegger's later writings on "language" also do not

constitute a form of linguistic idealism was more difficult to make, yet I believe we have shown that this is the most plausible way to understand what is at stake in “Language” and “The Way to Language.” Contrary to the arguments of Lafont and Carman, and in agreement with Wrathall, it seems clear that what “language” and “the saying of language” denote in Heidegger’s later works cannot be properly understood as the ontic languages that we use every day. As we have shown, Heidegger draws a distinction between the saying of language that articulates the well-jointed structure of an historical world, and the human speaking that derives its meaning *through* listening and responding to the saying of language. Indeed, we might well concede that in a certain sense Heidegger *is* a linguistic idealist in his later work, with the caveat that the primordial saying of language that articulates the meaning of historical worlds is *not* something that a linguistic idealist would recognize as a language. That is to say, Heidegger is not committed to the view that we can only encounter as meaningful those things that have been named in our language. Heidegger might be said to be a linguistic idealist in his later works in the sense that one must be in the thrall of a particular *logos* in order to encounter a thing in the way that one is supposed to given the meaningful context in which it *is* a thing. As Wrathall writes,

In its core, most fundamental meaning, ‘language’ in [the phrase “language is the house of being”] is not ‘human speaking – it is not the words, noises and marks, the rules, and so on that we normally think of when we talk about language. Instead, [it] means ‘saying,’ which Heidegger defines in terms of ‘a showing’ (Wrathall 2011, 154).

Trakl’s bread and wine is a good example of this, for in order to grasp the way that these things are meaningful for him, one must, like Trakl, be given over to, and speak from out of, the Christian world. Thus if we take two persons, one who is a German and a faithful

Catholic, and one who is an American and an avowed atheist, they will both be perfectly able to have access to the entities we denote with the words bread and wine or *Brot und Wein* as things that one can purchase at the local supermarket, but only the Catholic will have access to bread and wine *as* sacred symbols of Jesus Christ's sacrifice. This is not because she speaks a certain ontic language, but because she is claimed by the world of Christianity which is, in part, constituted by bread and wine.

This is not to say that Heidegger's thinking on these matters does not profoundly change in the time between *Being and Time* and his later writings. Indeed, I have argued that the shift is more radical than Wrathall acknowledges, for while discourse is a thoroughly communicative phenomenon in *Being and Time*, we have seen in "Language" and "The Way to Language" that this characteristic of *logos* has either dropped off the map or deeply changed. My contention is that the latter is closer to the truth, for, as we have seen, human speaking arises, for the later Heidegger, out of a *hearing* and *correspondence* with the originary saying of the *logos*. Interpersonal communication, whether by means of symbolic systems or body language, is secondary to this correspondence, just as the other *existentiale* of disposition and understanding become subordinate to and constituted by the norms established by the ringing of stillness. For the later Heidegger, we take our cues what is right, fitting, or best from the gods that rule over us, the mortals who have gone before us, and even the earth beneath our feet and the sky above our heads. Another and related difference between the early and late work is that the articulation of meaning is no longer something that is carried out in and through human discursive communication, but rather through the world-play of the mysterious movement of being itself. This is perhaps why Heidegger chooses to formally abandon

the project of phenomenological philosophizing and instead devote himself to the task of “thinking” (even if, in actuality, abandoned neither phenomenology nor philosophy in practice) for in his later works he comes to understand human finitude in such an extreme light that we are no longer capable of having a systematic or scientific grasp of the meaning of being. Thinkers and poets may still poetically express *partial* truths by way of listening to the ringing of stillness that speaks to us out of the saying of the *logos*. But just as surely as we are claimed by the movement of being, we cannot every hope to have a complete understanding of this movement. For the later Heidegger, philosophy is no longer a task of *discovering* ourselves and our world but rather a task of allowing ourselves to become conduits *through which* the essential truths of the world may give themselves expression.

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